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MARCH
1941

VOLUME 15
NUMBER 3

AMAZING STORIES

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Front cover painting by J. Allen St. John, depicting a scene from "The City of Mummies"

Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul, depicting "A City On Neptune"

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Volume XV
Number 3



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The OBSERVATORY

by THE Editor

IT seems every time we forecast a story for a future issue, it gets sidetracked, and we have to schedule it for a later issue. That's what happened to A. W. Bernal's "King Arthur's Knight in a Yankee Court" this month. It'll be in the April issue. However, it's worth waiting for, and it'll give you a grand bit of entertainment even if it makes a liar out of us.

NATURALLY you are cheering the second appearance of John Carter in AMAZING STORIES. Well, we think the novel in this issue is just what the doctor ordered for you. But once again, we find we've given you a wrong "steer" for the future. Because Edgar Rice Burroughs got himself all "het up" on John Carter, and turned out no less than five yarns about him, all of which are going to come at you as fast as we can present 'em. Stick with us, boys and girls, we've hit the jack-pot at last!

WE want to point out a yarn in this issue that is a hit on the unusual side. It's "Phoney Meteor" by that old favorite, John Beynon. It has plenty of that old "significance", and we don't mean maybe. It should leave you with a bit of a "wheezy" feeling, whatever that is. Anyway, it'll make you do a bit of serious thinking.

SOME ascribe this story to Ed Wynn, some to Adam. But it belongs, by fitness and adoption, to Amazing Stories.

It seems there was a certain parrot, the pet of the captain of an ocean liner. Always, on the last night of a voyage, the parrot hung in its cage on the stage of the salon. From that vantage point

it witnessed the amateur show that was a feature of the farewell party. Hundreds of these gala affairs the parrot witnessed, and it became so bored that eventually it would close its eyes and turn its head away. Always there were those horrible piano solos, those coloratura sopranos, those tap dancers.

But on this particular night the usual things were supplanted by something new. On the stage walked a man in a dress suit, top hat, and tails. In his hand he held a wand, and over one arm a large cloth was draped. The parrot was bored, but it opened one eye and watched languidly.

THE magician waved his cloth, showed both sides of it, draped it over his arm and waved his hand.

"Abracadabra!" he uttered. Then he whisked the cloth aside. There stood a golden stand, on it a large fishbowl, and in the bowl swam a pair of gold fish. The parrot opened its other eye.

Once more the magician showed both sides of the cloth, flung it dramatically over the goldfish, waved his wand, and spoke the magic word. And lo, when he whipped aside the cloth, the stand, the bowl, the fish, had utterly vanished! The parrot bobbed its head erect and stared with a fierce intensity at the magician.

THE magician walked toward the piano. Tense and silent, the parrot watched, not a feather moving. It stared fixedly as the magician waved his cloth, threw it over the instrument, waved his wand and spoke again.

"Ahracadabra!"

(Continued on page 95)



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The CITY OF

BY EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

**Dead a million years—yet their flesh was soft
and warm! What weird adventure was this that
confronted John Carter in the dungeons of Horz?**

ONE night that I could not sleep and was sitting on the beach watching the white maned chargers of the sea racing shoreward beneath the floodlights of the Moon, I saw the giant kings of old Hawaii and their mighty chiefs clothed in feather cape and helmet. Kamehameha came, the great conqueror, towering above them all. Down from the Nuuanu Pali he came in great strides, stepping over cane fields and houses. The hem of his feather cape caught on the spire of a church, toppling it to the ground. He stepped on low, soft ground; and when he lifted his foot, the water of a slough rushed into his footprint, and there was a lake.

I was much interested in the coming of Kamehameha the King, for I had always admired him; though I had never expected to see him, he having been dead a matter of a hundred years or so and his bones buried in a holy, secret place that no man knows. However, I was not at all surprised to see him. What surprised me was that I was not surprised. I distinctly recall this reaction.

I also recall that I hoped he would stop and not step on me.

I was thinking these thoughts,

Kamehameha stopped in front of me and looked down at me. "Well, well!" he said; "asleep on a beautiful night like this! I am surprised."

I blinked my eyes hard and looked again. There before me stood indeed a warrior strangely garbed, but it was not King Kamehameha. Under the moonlight ones eyes sometimes play strange tricks on one. I blinked mine again, but the warrior did not vanish. Then I knew!

Leaping to my feet, I extended my hand. "John Carter!" I exclaimed.

It was indeed the Prince of Helium, the Warlord of Mars, John Carter of Virginia—on Earth once more!

Lanikai is a district, a beach, a Post Office, and a grocery store. It lies on the windward shore of the Island of Oahu. It is a long way from Mars. Its waters are blue and beautiful and calm inside its coral reef, and the trade wind sighing through the fronds of its coconut palms at night might be the murmuring voices of the ghosts of the kings and chieftains who fished in its still waters long before the sea captains brought strange diseases or the missionaries brought mother-hubbards.

"Let's see," he said; "where was it

MUMMIES



This was no swordsman I faced, but a monstrosity out of Barsoom's Hell!

we met last—the headwaters of the Little Colorado or Tarzana?"

"The headwaters of the Little Colorado in Arizona, I think," I said. "That was a long time ago. I never expected to see you again."

"No, I never expected to return."

"Why have you? It must be something important."

"Nothing of Cosmic importance," he said, smiling; "but important to me, nevertheless. You see, I wanted to see you."

"I appreciate that," I said.

"You see, you are the last of my Earthly kin whom I know personally. Every once in a while I feel an urge to see you and visit with you, and at long intervals I am able to satisfy that urge—as now. After you are dead, and it will not be long now, I shall have no Earthly ties—no reason to return to the scenes of my former life."

"There are my children," I reminded him. "They are your blood kin."

"Yes," he said, "I know; but they might be afraid of me. After all, I might be considered something of a ghost by Earth men."

"Not by my children," I assured him. "They know you quite as well as I. After I am gone, see them occasionally."

He nodded. "Perhaps I shall," he half promised.

"And now," I said, "tell me something of yourself, of Mars, of Dejah Thoris, of Carthoris and Thuvia and of Tara of Helium. Let me see! It was Gahan of Gathol that Tara of Helium wed."

"Yes" replied The Warlord, "it was Gahan, Jed of the free city of Gathol. They have a daughter, one whose character and whose beauty are worthy of mother and her mother's mother—
which, like that of those other
curled nations at each other's
war. Perhaps you would like

to hear the story of Llana of Gathol."

I said that I would, and this is the story that he told me that night beneath the coconut palms of Oahu.

I

NO matter how instinctively gregarious one may be there are times when one longs for solitude. I like people. I like to be with my family, my friends, my fighting men; and probably just because I am so keen for companionship, I am at times equally keen to be alone. It is at such times that I can best resolve the knotty problems of government in times of war or peace. It is then that I can meditate upon all the various aspects of a full life such as I lead; and, being human, I have plenty of mistakes upon which to meditate that I may fortify myself against their recommitment.

When I feel that strange urge for solitude coming over me, it is my usual custom to take a one man flier and range the dead sea bottoms and the other uninhabited wildernesses of this dying planet; for there indeed is solitude. There are vast areas on Mars where no human foot has ever trod, and other vast areas that for thousands of years have known only the giant green men, the wandering nomads of the ocher deserts.

Sometimes I am away for weeks on these glorious adventures in solitude. Because of them, I probably know more of the geography and topography of Mars than any other living man; for they and my other adventurous excursions upon the planet have carried me from the Lost Sea of Korus in the Valley Dor at the frozen South to Okar, land of the black bearded Yellow Men of the frozen North, and from Kaol to Bantoom; and yet there are many parts of Barsoom that I have not visited,

which will not seem so strange when there is taken into consideration the fact that although the area of Mars is a little more than one fourth that of Earth its land area is almost eight million square miles greater. That is because Barsoom has no large bodies of surface water, its largest known ocean being entirely subterranean. Also, I think you will admit, fifty-six million square miles is a lot of territory to know thoroughly.

Upon the occasion of which I am about to tell you I flew northwest from Helium, which lies 30° south of the Equator which I crossed about sixteen hundred miles east of Exum, the Barsoomian Greenwich. North and west of me lay a vast, almost unexplored region; and there I thought to find the absolute solitude for which I craved.

I had set my directional compass upon Horz, the long deserted city of ancient Barsoomian culture, and loafed along at seventy-five miles an hour at an altitude of five hundred to a thousand feet. I had seen some green men northeast of Torquas and had been forced up to escape their fire, which I did not return as I was not seeking adventure; and I had crossed two thin ribbons of red Martian farm land bordering canals that bring the precious waters from the annually melting ice caps at the poles. Beyond these I saw no signs of human life in all the five thousand miles that lie between Lesser Helium and Horz.

It is always a little saddening to me to look down thus upon a dying world, to scan the endless miles of ocher, moss-like vegetation which carpets the vast areas where once rolled the mighty oceans of a young and virile Mars, to ponder that just beneath me once ranged the proud navies and the merchant ships of a dozen rich and powerful nations where today the fierce banth

roams a solitude whose silence is unbroken except for the roars of the killer and the screams of the killed.

At night I slept, secure in the knowledge that my directional compass would hold a true course for Horz and always at the altitude for which I had set it—a thousand feet, not above sea level but above the terrain over which the ship was passing. These amazing little instruments may be set for any point upon Barsoom and at any altitude. If one is set for a thousand feet, as mine was upon this occasion, it will not permit the ship to come closer than a thousand feet to any object, thus eliminating even the danger of collision; and when the ship reaches its objective the compass will stop it a thousand feet above. The pilot whose ship is equipped with one of these directional compasses does not even have to remain awake, thus I could travel day and night without danger.

IT was about noon of the third day that I sighted the towers of ancient Horz. The oldest part of the city lies upon the edge of a vast plateau; the newer portions, and they are countless thousands of years old, are terraced downward into a great gulf, marking the hopeless pursuit of the receding sea upon the shores of which this rich and powerful city once stood. The last poor, mean structures of a dying race have either disappeared or are only mouldering ruins now; but the splendid structures of her prime remain at the edge of the plateau, mute but eloquent reminders of her vanished grandeur—enduring monuments to the white skinned, fair haired race which has vanished forever.

I am always interested in these deserted cities of ancient Mars. Little is known of their inhabitants, other

than what can be gathered from the stories told by the carvings which ornament the exteriors of many of their public buildings and the few remaining murals which have withstood the ravages of time and the vandalism of the green hordes which have overrun many of them. The extremely low humidity has helped to preserve them, but more than all else was the permanency of their construction. Their magnificent edifices were built not for years but for eternities. The secrets of their mortars, their cements, and their pigments have been lost for ages; and for countless ages more, long after the last life has disappeared from the face of Barsoom, their works will remain, hurtling through space forever upon a dead, cold planet with no eye to see, with no mind to appreciate. It is a sad thing to contemplate.

At last I was over Horz. I had for long promised myself that some day I should come here, for Horz is, perhaps, the oldest and the greatest of the dead cities of Barsoom. Water built it, the lack of water spelled its doom. I often wonder if the people of Earth, who have water in such abundance, really appreciate it. I wonder if the inhabitants of New York City realize what it would mean to them if some enemy, establishing an air base within cruising radius of the first city of the New World, should successfully bomb and destroy Croton Dam and the Catskill water system. The railroads and the highways would be jammed with refugees, millions would die, and for years perhaps forever, New York City would cease to be.

As I floated lazily above the deserted city I saw figures moving in a plaza below me. So Horz was not entirely deserted! My curiosity piqued, I dropped a little lower; and what I saw dashed thoughts of solitude from

my mind—a lone red man beset by half a dozen fierce green warriors.

I had not sought adventure, but here it was; for no man worthy of his metal would abandon one of his own kind in such a dire extremity. I saw a spot where I might land in a nearby plaza; and, praying that the green men would be too engrossed with their engagement to note my approach, I dove quickly and silently toward a landing.

II

FORTUNATELY I landed unob-served, screened by a mighty tower which rose beside the plaza I had selected. I had seen that they were fighting with long-swords, and so I drew mine as I ran in the direction of the unequal struggle. That the red man lived even a few moments against such odds bespoke the excellence of his swordsmanship, and I hoped that he would hold out until I reached him; for then he would have the best sword arm in all Barsoom to aid him and the sword that had tasted the blood of a thousand enemies the length and breadth of a world.

I found my way from the plaza in which I had landed, but only to be confronted by a twenty foot wall in which I could perceive no opening. Doubtless there was one, I knew; but in the time that I might waste in finding it my man might easily be killed.

The clash of swords, the imprecations, and the grunts of fighting men came to me distinctly from the opposite side of the wall which barred my way. I could even hear the heavy breathing of the fighters. I heard the green men demand the surrender of their quarry and his taunting reply. I liked what he said and the way he said it in the face of death.

My knowledge of the ways of the

green men assured me that they would try to capture him for purposes of torture rather than kill him outright, but if I were to save him from either fate I must act quickly.

There was only one way to reach him without loss of time, and that way was open to me because of the lesser gravitation of Mars and my great Earthly strength and agility. I would simply jump to the top of the wall, take a quick survey of the lay of the land beyond, and then drop down, long-sword in hand, and take my place at the side of the red man.

When I exert myself, I can jump to incredible heights. Twenty feet is nothing, but this time I miscalculated. I was several yards from the wall when I took a short run and leaped into the air. Instead of alighting on the top of the wall, as I had planned, I soared completely over it, clearing it by a good ten feet.

Below me were the fighters. Apparently I was going to land right in their midst. So engrossed were they in their sword play that they did not notice me; and that was well for me; as one of the greenmen could easily have impaled me on his sword as I dropped upon them.

My man was being hard pressed. It was evident that the green men had given up the notion of capturing him, and were trying to finish him off. One of them had him at a disadvantage and was about to plunge a long-sword through him when I alighted. By rare good luck I alighted squarely upon the back of the man who was about to kill the red man, and I alighted with the point of my sword protruding straight below me. It caught him in the left shoulder and passed downward through his heart, and even before he collapsed I had planted both feet upon his shoulder; and, straightening up, withdrawn

my blade from his carcass.

FOR a moment my amazing advent threw them all off their guard, and in that moment I leaped to the side of the red man and faced his remaining foes, the red blood of a green warrior dripping from my point.

The red man threw a quick glance at me; and then the remaining green men were upon us, and there was no time for words. A fellow swung at me and missed. Gad! what a blow he swung! Had it connected I should have been as headless as a rykor. It was unfortunate for the green man that it did not, for mine did. I cut horizontally with all my Earthly strength, which is great on Earth and infinitely greater on Mars. My long-sword, its edge as keen as a razor and its steel such as only Barsoom produces, passed entirely through the body of my antagonist, cutting him in two.

"Well done!" exclaimed the red man, and again he cast a quick glance at me.

From the corner of my eye I caught an occasional glimpse of my unknown comrade, and I saw some marvellous swordsmanship. I was proud to fight at the side of such a man. By now we had reduced the number of our antagonists to three. They fell back a few steps, dropping their points, just for a breathing spell. I neither needed nor desired a breathing spell; but, glancing at my companion, I saw that he was pretty well exhausted; so I dropped my point too and waited.

It was then that I got my first good look at the man whose cause I had espoused; and I got a shock, too. This was no red man, but a white man if I have ever seen one. His skin bronzed by exposure to the sun mine; and that had at first shocked me. But now I saw that there was nothing red-Martian about

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harness, his weapons, everything about him differed from any that I had seen on Mars.

He wore a head dress, which is quite unusual upon Barsoom. It consisted of a leather band that ran around the head just above his brows, with another leather band crossing his head from right to left and a second from front to rear. These bands were highly ornamented with carving and set with jewels and precious metals. To the center of the band that crossed his forehead was affixed a flat piece of gold in the shape of a spearhead with the point up. This, also, was beautifully carved and bore a strange device inlaid in red and black.

Confined by this headdress was a shock of blond hair—a most amazing thing to see upon Mars. At first I jumped to the conclusion that he must be a thern from the far south-polar land; but that thought I discarded at once when I realized that the hair was his own. The therms are entirely bald and wear great yellow wigs.

I also saw that my companion was strangely handsome. I might say beautiful were it not for the effeminateness which the word connotes, and there was nothing effeminate about the way this man fought or the mighty oaths that he swore when he spoke at all to an adversary. We fighting men are not given to much talk, but when you feel your blade cleave a skull in twain or drive through the heart of a foeman, then sometimes a great oath is wrenched from your lips.

BUT I had little time then to appraise my companion, for the remaining were at us again in a moment. I that day, I suppose, as I have fought; but each time it seems that I have never fought so well at particular occasion. I do

not take great credit for my fighting ability, for it seems to me that my sword is inspired. No man could think as quickly as my point moves, always to the right spot at the right time, as though anticipating the next move of an adversary. It weaves a net of steel about me that few blades have ever pierced. It fills the foeman's eyes with amazement and his mind with doubt and his heart with fear. I imagine that much of my success has been due to the psychological effect of my swordsmanship upon my adversaries.

Simultaneously my companion and I each struck down an antagonist, and then the remaining warrior turned to flee. "Do not let him escape!" cried my comrade-in-arms, and leaped in pursuit, at the same time calling loudly for help, something he had not done when close to death before the points of six swords. But whom did he expect to answer his appeal in this dead and deserted city? Why did he call for help when the last of his antagonists was in full flight? I was puzzled; but having enlisted myself in this strange adventure, I felt that I should see it through; and so I set off in pursuit of the fleeing green man.

He crossed the courtyard where we had been engaged and made for a great archway that opened out into a broad avenue. I was close behind him, having outstripped both him and the strange warrior. When I came into the avenue I saw the green man leap to the back of one of six thoats waiting there, and at the same time I saw at least a hundred warriors pouring from a nearby building. They were yellow haired white men, garbed like my erstwhile fighting companion, who now joined in the pursuit of the green man. They were armed with bows and arrows; and they sent a volley of missiles after the escaping quarry, whom they

could never hope to overtake, and who was soon out of range of their weapons.

The spirit of adventure is so strong within me that I often yield to its demands in spite of the dictates of my better judgment. This matter was no affair of mine. I had already done all, and even more than could have been expected of me; yet I leaped to the back of one of the remaining thoats and took off in pursuit of the green warrior.

III

THERE are two species of thoats on Mars: the small, comparatively docile breed used by the red Martians as saddle animals and, to a lesser extent, as beasts of burden on the farms that border the great irrigation canals; and then there are the huge, vicious, unruly beasts that the green warroirs use exclusively as steeds of war.

These creatures tower fully ten feet at the shoulder. They have four legs on either side and a broad, flat tail, larger at the tip than at the root, that they hold straight out behind while running. Their gaping mouths split their heads from their snouts to their long, massive necks. Their bodies, the upper portion of which is a dark slate color and exceedingly smooth and glossy, are entirely devoid of hair. Their bellies are white, and their legs shade gradually from the slate color of their bodies to a vivid yellow at the feet, which are heavily padded and nailless.

The thoat of the green man has the most abominable disposition of any creature I have ever seen, not even the green men themselves excepted. They are constantly fighting among themselves, and woe betide the rider who loses control of his terrible mount; yet, paradoxical as it may appear, they are ridden without bridle or bit; and

are controlled solely by telepathic means, which, fortunately for me, I learned many years ago while I was prisoner of Lorquas Ptomei, jed of the Tharks, a green Martian horde.

The beast to whose back I had vaulted was a vicious devil, and he took violent exception to me and probably to my odor. He tried to buck me off; and, failing that, reached back with his huge, gaping jaws in an effort to seize me.

There is, I might mention, an auxiliary method of control when these ugly beasts become recalcitrant; and I adopted it in this instance, notwithstanding the fact that I had won grudging approval from the fierce green Tharks by controlling thoats through patience and kindness. I had time for neither now, as my quarry was racing along the broad avenue that led to the ancient quays of Horz and the vast dead sea bottoms beyond; so I laid heavily upon the head and snout of the beast with the flat of my broadsword until I had beaten it into subjection; then it obeyed my telepathic commands, and set out at great speed in pursuit.

It was a very swift thoat, one of the swiftest that I had ever bestrode; and in addition, it carried much less weight than the beast we sought to overtake; so we closed up rapidly on the escaping green man.

At the very edge of the plateau upon which the old city was built we caught up with him, and there he stopped and wheeled his mount and prepared to give battle. It was then that I began to appreciate the marvellous intelligence of my mount. Almost without direction from me he maneuvered into the correct positions to give me an advantage in this savage duel, and when at last I had achieved a sudden advantage which had almost unseated my rival, my thoat rushed like a mad devil upon the thoat

of the green warrior tearing at its throat with his mighty jaws while he tried to beat it to its knees with the weight of its savage assault.

It was then that I gave the *coup de grace* to my beaten and bloody adversary; and, leaving him where he had fallen, rode back to receive the plaudits and the thanks of my new-found friends.

THEY were waiting for me, a hundred of them, in what had probably once been a public market place in the ancient city of Horz. They were not smiling. They looked sad. As I dismounted, they crowded around me.

"Did the green man escape?" demanded one whose ornaments and metal proclaimed him a leader.

"No," I replied; "he is dead."

A great sigh of relief arose from a hundred throats. Just why they should feel such relief that a single green man had been killed I did not then understand.

They thanked me, crowding around me as they did so; and still they were unsmiling and sad. I suddenly realized that these people were not friendly—it came to me intuitively, but too late. They were pushing against me from all sides, so that I could not even raise an arm; and then, quite suddenly at a word from their leader, I was disarmed.

"What is the meaning of this?" I demanded. "Of my own volition I came to the aid of one of your people who would otherwise have been killed. Is this the thanks I am to receive? Give me back my weapons and let me go."

"I am sorry," said he who had first spoken, "but we cannot do otherwise. Pan Dan Chee, to whose aid you came, has pled that we permit you to go your way; but such is not the law of Horz. I must take you to Ho Ran Kim, the great jeddak of Horz. There we will

all plead for you, but our pleas will be unavailing. In the end you will be destroyed. The safety of Horz is more important than the life of any man."

"I am not threatening the safety of Horz," I replied. "Why should I have designs upon a dead city, which is of absolutely no importance to the Empire of Helium, in the service of whose Jed-dak, Tardos Mors, I wear the harness of a Warlord."

"I am sorry," exclaimed Pan Dan Chee, who had pushed his way to my side through the press of warriors. "I called to you when you mounted the throat and pursued the green warrior and told you not to return, but evidently you did not hear me. For that I may die, but I shall die proudly. I sought to influence Lan Sohn Wen who commands this utan to permit you to escape, but in vain. I shall intercede for you with Ho Ran Kim, the jeddak; but I am afraid that there is no hope."

"Come!" said Lan Sohn Wen; "we have wasted enough time here. We will take the prisoner to the jeddak. By the way, what is your name?"

"I am John Carter, a Prince of Helium and Warlord of Barsoom," I replied.

"A proud title, that last," he said; "but of Helium I have never heard."

"If harm befalls me here," I said, "you'll hear of Helium if Helium ever learns."

I was escorted through still magnificent avenues flanked by beautiful buildings, still beautiful in decay. I think I have never seen such inspiring architecture, nor construction so enduring. I do not know how old these buildings are, but I have heard Martian savants argue that the original dominant race of white skinned, yellow haired people flourished fully a million years ago. It seems incredible that their works should still exist; but there are many things on Mars incredible to

the narrow, earthbound men of our little speck of dust.

AT last we halted before a tiny gate in a colossal, fortresslike edifice in which there was no other opening than this small gate for fifty feet above the ground. From a balcony fifty feet above the gate a sentry looked down upon us. "Who comes?" he demanded, although he could doubtless see who came, and must have recognized Lan Sohn Wen.

"It is Lan Sohn Wen, Dwar, commanding the 1st Utan of The Jeddak's Guard, with a prisoner," replied Lan Sohn Wen.

The sentry appeared bewildered. "My orders are to admit no strangers," he said, "but to kill them immediately."

"Summon the commander of the guard," snapped Lan Sohn Wen, and presently an officer came onto the balcony with the sentry.

"What is this?" he demanded. "No prisoner has ever been brought into the citadel of Horz. You know the law."

"This is an emergency," said Lan Sohn Wen. "I must bring this man before Ho Ran Kim. Open the gate!"

"Only on orders from Ho Ran Kim himself," replied the commander of the guard.

"Then go get the orders," said Lan Sohn Wen. "Tell the Jeddak that I strongly urge him to receive me with this prisoner. He is not as other prisoners who have fallen into our hands in times past."

The officer reentered the citadel and was gone for perhaps fifteen minutes when the little gate before which we stood swung outward, and we were motioned in by the commander of the guard himself.

"The Jeddak will receive you," he said to our dwarf.

The citadel was an enormous walled city within the ancient city of Horz. It

was quite evidently impregnable to any but attack by air. Within were pleasant avenues, homes, gardens, shops. Happy, carefree people stopped to look at me in astonishment as I was conducted down a broad boulevard toward a handsome building. It was the palace of the Jeddak, Ho Ran Kim. A sentry stood upon either side of the portal. There was no other guard; and these two were there more as a formality and as messengers than for protection, for within the walls of the citadel no man needed protection from another, as I was to learn.

We were detained in an ante room for a few minutes while we were being announced, and then we were ushered down a long corridor and into a medium size room where a man sat at a desk alone. This was Ho Ran Kim, Jeddak of Horz. His skin was not as tanned as that of his warriors, but his hair was just as yellow and his eyes as blue.

I felt those blue eyes appraising me as I approached his desk. They were kindly eyes, but with a glint of steel. From me they passed to Lan Sohn Wen, and to him Ho Ran Kim spoke.

"This is most unusual," he said in a quiet, well modulated voice. "You know, do you not, that Horzans have died for less than this?"

"I do, my Jeddak," replied the dwarf; "but this is a most unusual emergency."

"Explain yourself," said the Jeddak.

"Let me explain," interrupted Pan Dan Chee, "for after all the responsibility is mine. I urged this action upon Lan Sohn Wen."

The Jeddak nodded. "Proceed," he said.

IV

I COULDN'T comprehend why we were making such an issue about a prisoner, nor why m-

for less, as Ho Ran Kim had reminded Lan Sohn Wen. In Helium, a warrior would have received at least commendation for bringing in a prisoner. For bringing in John Carter, Warlord of Mars, a common warrior might easily have been ennobled by an enemy prince.

"My Jeddak," commenced Pan Dan Chee, "while I was beset by six green warriors, this man, who says he is known as John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom, came of his own volition to fight at my side. From whence he came I do not know. I only know that at one moment I was fighting alone, a hopeless fight, and that at the next there fought at my side the greatest swordsman Horz has ever seen. He did not have to come; he could have left at any time, but he remained, and because he remained I am alive and the last of the six green warriors lies dead by the ancient waterfront. He would have escaped had not John Carter leaped to the back of a great thoat and pursued him."

"Then this man could have escaped, but he came back. He fought for a soldier of Horz. He trusted the men of Horz. Are we to repay him with death?"

Pan Dan Chee ceased speaking, and Ho Ran Kim turned his blue eyes upon me. "John Carter," he said, "what you have done commands the respect and sympathy of every man of Horz. It wins the thanks of their Jeddak, but—" He hesitated. "Perhaps if I tell you something of our history, you will understand why I must condemn you to death." He paused for a moment, as though in thought.

At the same time I was doing a little thinking on my own account. The casting of the lot in which Ho Ran Kim had condemned me to death had rather taken away. He seemed so friendly. Didn't seem possible that he

was in earnest, but a glance at the glint in those blue eyes assured me that he was not being facetious.

"I am sure," I said, "that the history of Horz must be most interesting; but right now I am most interested in learning why I should have to die for befriending a fighting man of Horz."

"That I shall explain," he said.

"It is going to take a great deal of explaining, your majesty," I assured him.

He paid no attention to that, but continued. "The inhabitants of Horz are, as far as we know, the sole remaining remnant of the once dominant race of Barsoom, the Orovarts. A million years ago our ships ranged the five great oceans, which we ruled. The city of Horz was not only the capital of a great empire, it was the seat of learning and culture of the most glorious race of human beings a world has ever known. Our empire spread from pole to pole. There were other races on Barsoom, but they were few in numbers and negligible in importance. We looked upon them as inferior creatures. The Orovarts owned Barsoom, which was divided among a score of powerful jeddaks. They were a happy, prosperous, contented people, the various nations seldom warring upon one another.

"They had reached the ultimate pinnacle of civilization and perfection when the first shadow of impending fate darkened their horizon—the seas began to recede, the atmosphere to grow more tenuous. What science had long predicted was coming to pass—a world was dying.

"For ages our cities followed the receding waters. Straits and bays, canals and lakes dried up. Prosperous seaports became deserted inland cities. Famine came. Hungry hordes made war upon the more fortunate. The growing hordes of wild green men over-

kinder to destroy John Carter and Pan Dan Chee at once."

"Wait, majesty," said Pan Dan Chee. "I know where lies the entrance to the pits. I have been in them. They can easily be made most comfortable. I would not think of altering your plans or causing you immediately the deep grief of sorrowing over the untimely passing of John Carter and myself. Come, Lan Sohn Wen! I will lead the way to the pits of Horz!"

V

IT was a good thing for me that Pan Dan Chee was a fast talker. Before Ho Ran Kim could formulate any objections we were out of the audience chamber and on our way to the pits of Horz, and I can tell you that I was glad to be out of sight of that kindly and considerate tyrant. There was no telling when some new humanitarian urge might influence him to order our heads lopped off instanter.

The entrance to the pits of Horz was in a small, windowless building near the rear wall of the citadel. It was closed by massive gates that creaked on corroded hinges as two of the warriors who had accompanied us pushed them open.

"It is dark in there," said Pan Dan Chee. "We'll break our necks without a light."

Lan Sohn Wen, being a good fellow, sent one of his men for some torches; and when he returned, Pan Dan Chee and I entered the gloomy cavern.

We had taken but a few steps toward the head of a rock hewn ramp that ran downward into Stygian darkness, when Lan Sohn Wen cried, "Wait! Where is the key to these gates?"

"The keeper of the keys of some great jeddak who lived thousands of years ago may have known," replied

Pan Dan Chee, "but I don't."

"But how am I going to lock you in?" demanded Lan Sohn Wen.

"The Jeddak didn't tell you to lock us in," said Pan Dan Chee. "He said to take us to the pits and leave us there for the night. I distinctly recall his very words."

Lan Sohn Wen was in a quandary, but at last he hit upon an avenue of escape. "Come," he said, "I shall take you back to the Jeddak and explain that there are no keys; then it will be up to him."

"And you know what he will do!" said Pan Dan Chee.

"What?" asked Lan Sohn Wen.

"He will order us destroyed at once. Come, Lan Sohn Wen, do not condemn us to immediate death. Post a guard here at the gates, with orders to kill us if we try to escape."

Lan Sohn Wen considered this for a moment, and finally nodded his head in acquiescence. "That is an excellent plan," he said, and then he detailed two warriors to stand guard; and arranged for their relief, after which he wished us good night and departed.

I have never seen such courteous and considerate people as the Orovars; it might almost be a pleasure to have one's throat slit by one of them, he would be so polite about it. They are the absolute opposites of their hereditary enemies, the green men; for these are endowed with neither courtesy, consideration, nor kindness. They are cold, cruel, abysmal brutes to whom love is unknown and whose creed is hate.

NEVERTHELESS, the pits of Horz was not a pleasant place. The dust of ages lay upon the ramp down which we walked. From its end a corridor stretched away beyond the limits of our torchlight. It was a wide corridor, with doors opening from it on either side. These, I presumed, were the dungeons

ran what had once been fertile farm land, preying upon all.

"The atmosphere became so tenuous that it was difficult to breathe. Scientists were working upon an atmosphere plant, but before it was completed and in successful operation all but a few of the inhabitants of Barsoom had died. Only the hardiest survived—the green men, the red men, and a few Orovars; then life became merely a battle for the survival of the fittest.

"The green men hunted us as we had hunted beasts of prey. They gave us no rest, they showed us no mercy. We were few; they were many. Horz became our last city of refuge, and our only hope of survival lay in preventing the outside world from knowing that we existed; therefore, for ages we have slain every stranger who came to Horz and saw an Orovár, that no man might go away and betray our presence to our enemies.

"Now you will understand that no matter how deeply we must regret the necessity, it is obvious that we cannot allow you to carry word to our enemies.

"I can understand," I said, "that you might feel it necessary to destroy an enemy; but I see no reason for destroying a friend. However, that is for you to decide."

"It is already decided, my friend," said the Jeddak. "You must die."

"Just a moment, O Jeddak!" exclaimed Pan Dan Chee. "Before you pass final judgment, consider this alternative. If he remains here in Horz, he cannot carry word to our enemies. We owe him a debt of gratitude. Permit him then to live, but always within the walls of the citadel."

THERE were nods of approval from the others present, and I saw by his quickly darting eyes that Ho Ran Kim had noticed them. He cleared his

throat. "Perhaps that is something that should be given thought," he said. "I shall reserve judgment until the morrow. I do so largely because of my love for you, Pan Dan Chee; inasmuch as, because it was due to your importunities that this man is here, you must suffer whatever fate is ordained for him."

Pan Dan Chee was certainly surprised, nor could he hide the fact; but he took the blow like a man. "I shall consider it an honor," he said, "to share any fate that may be meted to John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom."

"Well said, Pan Dan Chee!" exclaimed the Jeddak. "My admiration for you increases as does the bitterness of my sorrow when I contemplate the almost inescapable conviction that on the morrow you die."

Pan Dan Chee bowed. "I thank your majesty for your deep concern," he said. "The remembrance of it will glorify my last hours."

The Jeddak turned his eyes upon Lan Sohn Wen, and held them there for what seemed a full minute. I would have laid ten to one that Ho Ran Kim was about to cause himself further untold grief by condemning Lan Sohn Wen to death. I think Lan Sohn Wen thought the same thing. He looked worried.

"Lan Sohn Wen," said Ho Ran Kim, "you will conduct these two to the pits and leave them there for the night. See that they have good food and every possible comfort, for they are my honored guests."

"But the pits, your majesty!" exclaimed Lan Sohn Wen. "They have never been used within the memory of man. I do not even know that I can find the entrance to them."

"That is so," said Ho Ran Kim, thoughtfully. "Even if you found them they might prove very dirty and uncomfortable. Perhaps it would be

where ancient jeddaks had confined their enemies. I asked Pan Dan Chee.

"Probably," he said, "though our jeddaks have never used them."

"Have they never had enemies?" I asked.

"Certainly, but they have considered it cruel to imprison men in dark holes like this; so they have always destroyed them immediately they were suspected of being enemies."

"Then why are the pits here?" I demanded.

"Oh, they were built when the city was built, perhaps a million years ago, perhaps more. It just chanced that the citadel was built around the entrance."

I glanced into one of the dungeons. A mouldering skeleton lay upon the floor, the rusted irons that had secured it to the wall lying among its bones. In the next dungeon were three skeletons and two magnificently carved, metal bound chests. As Pan Dan Chee raised the lid of one of them I could scarce repress a gasp of astonishment and admiration. The chest was filled with magnificent gems in settings of elaborate beauty, specimens of forgotten arts, the handicraft of master craftsmen who had lived a million years ago. I think that nothing that I had ever seen before had so impressed me. And it was depressing, for these jewels had been worn by lovely women and brave men who had disappeared into an oblivion so complete that not even a memory of them remained.

My reverie was interrupted by the sound of shuffling feet behind me. I wheeled; and, instinctively, my hand flew to where the hilt of a sword should have been but was not. Facing me, and ready to spring upon me, was the largest ulsio I had ever seen.

These Martian rats are fierce and unlovely things. They are many legged and hairless, their hide resembling that

of a new-born mouse in repulsiveness. Their eyes are small and close set and almost hidden in deep, fleshy apertures. Their most ferocious and repulsive features, however, are their jaws, the entire bony structure of which protrudes several inches beyond the flesh, revealing five sharp, spadelike teeth in each jaw, the whole suggesting the appearance of a rotting face from which much of the flesh has sloughed away. Ordinarily they are about the size of an Airedale terrier, but the thing that leaped for me in the pits of Horz that day was as large as a small puma and ten times as ferocious.

As the creature leaped for my throat, I struck it a heavy blow on the side of its head and knocked it to one side; but it was up at once and at me again; then Pan Dan Chee came into the scene. They had not disarmed him, and with short-sword he set upon the ulsio.

It was quite a battle. That ulsio was the most ferocious and most determined beast I had ever seen, and it gave Pan Dan Chee the fight of his life. He had knocked off two of its six legs, an ear, and most of its teeth before the ferocity of its repeated attacks abated at all. It was almost cut to ribbons, yet it always forced the fighting. I could only stand and look on, which is not such a part in a fight as I like to take. At last, however, it was over; the ulsio was dead, and Pan Dan Chee looked at me and smiled.

HE was looking around for something upon which he might wipe the blood from his blade. "Perhaps there is something in this other chest," I suggested; and, walking to it, I lifted the lid.

The chest was about seven feet long, two and a half wide and two deep. In it lay the body of a man. His elaborate harness was encrusted with jewels. He

wore a helmet entirely covered with diamonds, one of the few helmets I had ever seen upon Mars. The scabbards of his long-sword, his short-sword and his dagger were similarly emblazoned.

He had been a very handsome man, and he was still a handsome corpse. So perfectly was he preserved that, insofar as appearances went, he might still have been alive but for the thin layer of dust overlying his features. When I blew this away he looked quite as alive as you or I.

"You bury your dead here?" I asked Pan Dan Chee.

"No," he replied. "This chap may have been here a million years."

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed. "He would have dried up and blown away thousands of years ago."

"I don't know about that," said Pan Dan Chee. "There were lots of things that those old fellows knew that are lost arts today. Embalming, I know, was one of them. There is the legend of Lee Um Lo, the most famous embalmer of all time. It recounts that his work was so perfect that not even the corpse, himself, knew that he was dead; and upon several occasions they arose and walked out during the funeral services. The end of Lee Um Lo came when the wife of a great jeddak failed to realize that she was dead, and walked right in on the jeddak and his new wife. The next day Lee Um Lo lost his head."

"It is a good story," I said, laughing; "but I hope this chap realizes that he is dead; because I am about to disarm him. Little could he have dreamed a million years ago that one day he was going to rear in The Warlord of Barsoom."

Pan Dan Chee helped me raise the corpse and remove its harness; and we were both rather startled by the soft, pliable texture of the flesh and its normal warmth.

"Do you suppose we could be mistaken?" I asked. "Could it be that he is not dead?"

Pan Dan Chee shrugged. "The knowledge and the arts of the ancients are beyond the ken of modern man," he said.

"That doesn't help a bit," I said. "Do you think this chap can be alive?"

"His face was covered with dust," said Pan Dan Chee, "and no one has been in these pits for thousands and thousands of years. If he isn't dead, he should be."

I quite agreed, and buckled the gorgeous harness about me without more ado. I drew the swords and the dagger and examined them. They were as bright and fine as the day they had received their first polish, and their edges were keen. Once again, I felt like a whole man, so much is a sword a part of me.

As we stepped out into the corridor I saw a light far away. It was gone almost in the instant. "Did you see that?" I asked Pan Dan Chee.

"I saw it," he said, and his voice was troubled. "There should be no light here, for there are no people."

We stood straining our eyes along the corridor for a repetition of the light. There was none, but from afar there echoed down that black corridor a hollow laugh.

VI

PAN DAN CHEE looked at me.

"What," he asked, "could that have been?"

"It sounded very much like a laugh to me," I replied.

Pan Dan Chee nodded. "Yes," he agreed, "but how can there be a laugh where there is no one to laugh?"

"Perhaps the ulsios of Horz have learned to laugh," I suggested with a smile.

Pan Dan Chee ignored my flippancy. "We saw a light and we heard a laugh," he said thoughtfully. "What does that convey to you?"

"The same thing that it conveys to you," I said: "that there is some one down here in the pits of Horz beside us."

"I do not see how that can be possible," he said.

"Let's investigate," I suggested.

With drawn swords we advanced; for we did not know the nature nor the temper of the owner of that laugh, and there was always the chance that an ulsio might leap from one of the dungeons and attack us.

The corridor ran straight for some distance, and then commenced to curve. There were many branches and intersections, but we kept to what we believed to be the main corridor. We saw no more lights; heard no more laughter. There was not a sound in all that vast labyrinth of passageways other than the subdued clanking of our metal, the occasional shuffling of our sandaled feet, and the soft whisperings of our leather harnesses.

"It is useless to search farther," said Pan Dan Chee at last. "We might as well start back."

Now I had no intention of going back to my death. I reasoned that the light and the laugh indicated the presence of man in these pits. If the inhabitants of Horz knew nothing of them; then they must enter the pits from outside the citadel, indicating an avenue of escape open to me. Therefore, I did not wish to retrace our steps; so I suggested that we rest for a while and discuss our future plans.

"We can rest," said Pan Dan Chee, "but there is nothing to discuss. Our plans have all been made for us by Ho Ran Kim."

We entered a cell which contained no

grim reminders of past tragedy; and, after wedging one of our torches in a niche in the wall, we sat down on the hard stone floor.

"Perhaps your plans have been made for you by Ho Ran Kim," I said, "but I make my own plans."

"And they are—?" he asked.

"I am not going back to be murdered. I am going to find a way out of these pits."

Pan Dan Chee shook his head sorrowfully. "I am sorry," he said, "but you are going back to meet your fate with me."

"What makes you think that?" I asked.

"Because I shall have to take you back. You well know that I cannot let a stranger escape from Horz."

"That means that we shall have to fight to the death, Pan Dan Chee," I said; "and I do not wish to kill one at whose side I have fought and whom I have learned to admire."

"I feel the same way, John Carter," said Pan Dan Chee. "I do not wish to kill you; but you must see my position—if you do not come with me willingly, I shall have to kill you."

I TRIED to argue him out of his foolish stand, but he was adamant. I was positive that Pan Dan Chee liked me; and I shrank from the idea of killing him, as I knew that I should. He was an excellent swordsman, but what chance would he have against the master swordsman of two worlds? I am sorry if that should sound like boasting; for I abhor boasting—I only spoke what is a fact. I am, unquestionably, the best swordsman that has ever lived.

"Well," I said, "we don't have to kill each other at once. Let's enjoy each other's company for a while longer."

Pan Dan Chee smiled. "That will suit me perfectly," he said.

"How about a game of Jetan?" I asked.

"How can we play Jetan without a board or the pieces?" he asked.

I opened the leather pocket pouch such as all Martians carry, and took out a tiny, folding Jetan board with all the pieces—a present from Dejah Thoris, my incomparable mate. Pan Dan Chee was intrigued by it, and it is a marvelously beautiful piece of work. The greatest artist of Helium had designed the pieces, which had been carved under his guidance by two of our greatest sculptors.

Each of the pieces, such as Warriors, Pawdars, Dwars, Panthans, and Chiefs, were carved in the likeness of well known Martian fighting men; and one of the Princesses was a beautifully executed miniature carving of Tara of Helium, and the other Princess, Llana of Gathol.

I am inordinately proud of this Jetan set; and because the figures are so tiny, I always carry a small but powerful reading glass, not alone that I may enjoy them but that others may. I offered it now to Pan Dan Chee, who examined the figures minutely.

"Extraordinary," he said. "I have never seen anything more beautiful." He had examined one figure much longer than he had the others, and he held it in his hand now as though loath to relinquish it. "What an exquisite imagination the artist must have had who created this figure, for he could have had no model for such gorgeous beauty; since nothing like it exists on Barsoom."

"Every one of those figures was carved from life," I told him.

"Perhaps the others," he said, "but not this one. No such beautiful woman ever lived."

"Which one is it?" I asked, and he handed it to me. "This," I said, "is Llana of Gathol, the daughter of Tara

of Helium, who is my daughter. She really lives, and this is a most excellent likeness of her. Of course it cannot do her justice, since it cannot reflect her animation nor the charm of her personality."

He took the little figurine back and held it for a long time under the glass; then he replaced it in the box. "Shall we play?" I asked.

He shook his head. "It would be sacrilege," he said, "to play at a game with the figure of a goddess."

I packed the pieces back in the tiny box, which was also the playing board, and returned it to my pouch. Pan Dan Chee sat silent. The light of the single torch cast our shadows deep and dark upon the floor.

These torches of Horz were a revelation to me. They are most ingenious. Cylindrical, they have a central core which glows brightly with a cold light when exposed to the air. By turning back a hinged cap and pushing the central core up with a thumb button, it becomes exposed to the air and glows brightly. The farther up it is pushed and the more of it that is exposed, the more intense the light. Pan Dan Chee told me that they were invented ages ago, and that the lighting results in so little loss of matter that they are practically eternal. The art of producing the central core was lost in far antiquity, and no scientist since has been able to analyze its composition.

It was a long time before Pan Dan Chee spoke again; then he arose. He looked tired and sad. "Come," he said, "let's have it over with," and he drew his sword.

"Why should we fight?" I asked. "We are friends. If I go away, I pledge my honor that I will not lead others to Horz. Let me go, then, in peace. I do not wish to kill you. Or, better still, you come away with me. There is much

to see in the world outside of Horz and much to adventure."

"Don't tempt me," he begged, "for I want to come. For the first time in my life I want to leave Horz, but I may not. Come! John Carter. On guard! One of us must die, unless you return willingly with me."

"In which case both of us will die," I reminded him. "It is very silly, Pan Dan Chee."

"On guard!" was his only reply.

There was nothing for me to do but draw and defend myself. Never have I drawn with less relish.

VII

PAN DAN CHEE would not take the offensive, and he offered very little in the way of defense. I could have run him through at any time that I chose from the very instant that I drew my sword. Almost immediately I realized that he was offering me my freedom at the expense of his own life, but I would not take his life.

Finally I backed away and dropped my point. "I am no butcher, Pan Dan Chee," I said. "Come! put up a fight."

He shook his head. "I cannot kill you," he said, quite simply.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I am a fool," he said. "The same blood flows in your veins and hers. I could not spill that blood. I could not bring unhappiness to her."

"What do you mean?" I demanded. "What are you talking about?"

"I am talking about Llana of Gathol," he said, "the most beautiful woman in the world, the woman I shall never see but for whom I gladly offer my life."

Now, Martian fighting men are proverbially chivalrous to a fault; but this was carrying it much further than I had ever seen it carried before.

"Very well," I said; "and as I don't

intend killing you there is no use going on with this silly duel."

I returned my sword to its scabbard, and Pan Dan Chee did likewise.

"What shall we do?" he asked. "I cannot let you escape; but, on the other hand, I cannot prevent it. I am a traitor to my country. I shall, therefore, have to destroy myself."

I had a plan. I would accompany Pan Dan Chee back almost to the entrance to the pits, and there I would overpower, bind, and gag him; then I would make my escape, or at least I would try to find another exit from the pits. Pan Dan Chee would be discovered, and could face his doom without the stigma of treason being attached to his name.

"You need not kill yourself," I told him. "I will accompany you to the entrance to the pits; but I warn you that should I discover an opportunity to escape, I shall do so."

"That is fair enough," he said. "It is very generous of you. You have made it possible for me to die honorably and content."

"Do you wish to die?" I asked.

"Certainly not," he assured me. "I wish to live. If I live, I may some day find my way to Gathol."

"Why not come with me, then?" I demanded. "Together we may be able to find our way out of the pits. My flier lies but a short distance from the citadel, and it is only about four thousand haads from Horz to Gathol."

He shook his head. "The temptation is great," he said, "but until I have exhausted every resource and failed to return to Ho Ran Kim before noon tomorrow I may do nothing else but try."

"Why by noon tomorrow?" I asked.

"It is a very ancient Orovaran law," he replied, "which limits the duration of a death sentence to noon of the day one is condemned to die. Ho Ran Kim

decreed that we should die tomorrow. If we do not, we are not in honor bound to return to him."

WE set off a little dejectedly for the doorway through which we were expected to pass to our doom. Of course, I had no intention of doing so; but I was dejected because of Pan Dan Chee. I had come to like him immensely. He was a man of high honor and a courageous fighter.

We walked on and on, until I became convinced that if we had followed the right corridor we should long since have arrived at the entrance. I suggested as much to Pan Dan Chee, and he agreed with me; then we retraced our steps and tried another corridor. We kept this up until we were all but exhausted.

"I am afraid we are lost," said Pan Dan Chee.

"I am quite sure of it," I agreed, with a smile. If we were sufficiently well lost, we might not find the entrance before the next noon; in which event Pan Dan Chee would be free to go where he pleased, and I had a pretty good idea of where he pleased to go.

Now, I am no match maker; nor neither do I believe in standing in the way to prevent the meeting of a man and a maid. I believe in letting nature take her course. If Pan Dan Chee thought he was in love with Llana of Gathol and wished to go to Gathol and try to win her, I would only have discouraged the idea had he been a man of low origin or of a dishonorable nature. He was neither. The race to which he belonged is the oldest of the cultured races of Barsoom, and Pan Dan Chee had proved himself a man of honor.

I had no reason to believe that his suit would meet with any success. Llana of Gathol was still very young, but

even so the swords of some of the greatest houses of Barsoom had been laid at her feet. Like nearly all Martian women of high degree she knew her mind. Like so many of them, she might be abducted by some impetuous suitor; and she would either love him or slip a dagger between his ribs, but she would never mate with a man she did not love. I was more fearful for Pan Dan Chee than I was for Llana of Gathol.

We retraced our steps and tried another corridor, yet still no entrance. We lay down and rested; then we tried again. The result was the same.

"It must be nearly morning," said Pan Dan Chee.

"It is," I said, consulting my chronometer. "It is almost noon."

Of course I didn't use the term *noon*; but rather the Barsoomian equivalent, 25 xats past the 3rd zode, which is just half way between 6 A.M. and 6 P.M. Earth time.

"We must hurry!" exclaimed Pan Dan Chee.

A hollow laugh sounded behind us; and, turning quickly, we saw a light in the distance. It disappeared immediately.

"Why should we hurry?" I demanded. "We have done the best we could. That we did not find our way back to the citadel and death is no fault of ours."

Pan Dan Chee nodded. "And no matter how much we may hurry, there is little likelihood that we shall ever find the entrance."

Of course this was wishful thinking, but it was also quite accurate thinking. We never did find the entrance to the citadel.

"This is the second time we have heard that laugh and seen that light," said Pan Dan Chee. "I think we should investigate it. Perhaps he who makes the light and voices the laugh may be

able to direct us to the entrance."

"I have no objection to investigating," I said, "but I doubt that we shall find a friend if we find the author."

"It is most mystifying," said Pan Dan Chee. "All my life I have believed, as all other inhabitants of Horz have believed, that the pits of Horz were deserted. A long time ago, perhaps ages, some venturesome men entered the pits to investigate them. These incursions occurred at intervals, and none of those who entered the pits ever returned. It was assumed that they became lost and starved to death. Perhaps they, too, heard the laughter and saw the lights!"

"Perhaps," I said.

VIII

PAN DAN CHEE and I lost all sense of time, so long were we in the pits of Horz without food or water. It could not have been more than two days, as we still had strength; and more than two days without water will sap the strength of the best of men. Twice more we saw the light and heard the laughter. That laugh! I can hear it yet. I tried to think that it was human. I didn't want to go mad.

Pan Dan Chee said, "Let's find it and drink its blood!"

"No, Pan Dan Chee," I counseled. "We are men, not beasts."

"You are right," he said. "I was losing control."

"Let's use our heads," I said. "He knows always where we are, because always he can see the light of our torch. Suppose we extinguish it, and creep forward silently. If he has curiosity, he will investigate. We shall listen attentively, and we shall hear his footfalls." I had it all worked out beautifully, and Pan Dan Chee agreed that it was a perfect plan. I think he still had in

mind the drinking of the creature's blood, when we should find it. I was approaching a point when I might have taken a drink myself. God! If you have never suffered from hunger and thirst, don't judge others too harshly.

We extinguished the torch. We each had one, but there was no use in keeping both lighted. The light of one could have been raised to a brilliancy that would have blinded. We crept silently forward in the direction that we had last seen the light. Our swords were drawn. Three times already we had been set upon by the huge ulsios of these ancient pits of Horz, but at these times we had had the advantage of the light of our torch. I could not but wonder how we would come out if one of them attacked us now.

The darkness was total, and there was no sound. We clung to our weapons so that they would not clank against our metal. We lifted our sandaled feet high and placed them gently on the stone flooring. There was no scuffing. There was no sound. We scarcely breathed.

Presently a light appeared before us. We halted, waiting, listening. I saw a figure. Perhaps it was human, perhaps not. I touched Pan Dan Chee lightly on the arm, and moved forward. He came with me. We made no sound—absolutely no sound. I think that we each held his breath.

The light grew brighter. Now I could see a head and shoulder protruding from a doorway at the side of the corridor. The thing had the contour of humanity at least. I could imagine that it was concerned over our sudden disappearance. It was wondering what had become of us. It withdrew within the doorway where it had stood, but the light persisted. We could see it shining from the interior of the cell or room into which the THING had withdrawn.

We crept closer. Here might lie the answer to our quest for water and for food. If the THING were human, it would require both; and if it had them, we would have them.

Silently we approached the doorway from which the light streamed out into the corridor. Our swords were drawn. I was in the lead. I felt that if the THING had any warning of our approach, it would disappear. That must not happen. We must see IT. We must seize IT, and we must force IT to give us water—food and water!

I reached the doorway, and as I stepped into the opening I had a momentary glimpse of a strange figure; and then all was plunged into darkness and a hollow laugh reverberated through the Stygian blackness of the pits of Horz.

In my right hand I held the long-sword of that long dead Orovaran from whose body I had filched it. In my left hand I held the amazing torch of the Horzians. When the light in the chamber was extinguished, I pushed up the thumb button of my torch; and the apartment before me was flooded with light.

I SAW a large chamber filled with many chests. There was a simple couch, a bench, a table, bookshelves filled with books, an ancient Martian stove, a reservoir of water and the strangest figure of a man my eyes had ever rested upon.

I rushed at him and held my sword against his heart, for I did not wish him to escape. He cowered and screamed, beseeching his life.

"We want water," I said; "water and food. Give us these and offer us no harm, and you will be safe."

"Help yourselves," he said. "There is water and food here, but tell me who you are and how you got here to the

pits of ancient Horz, dead Horz—dead for countless ages. I have been waiting for ages for some one to come, and now you have come. You are welcome. We shall be great friends. You shall stay here with me forever, as all the countless others have. I shall have company in the lonely pits of Horz."

It was evident that the creature was quite mad. He not only looked it, he acted it. Sometimes his speech was inarticulate gibber; often it was broken by meaningless and inopportune laughter—the hollow laugh that we had heard before.

His appearance was most repulsive. He was naked except for the harness which supported a sword and a dagger, and the skin of his mal-formed body was a ghastly white—the color of a corpse. His flabby mouth hung open, revealing a few yellow, snaggle fangs. His eyes were wide and round, the whites showing entirely around the irises. He had no nose; it appeared to have been eaten away by disease.

I kept an eye on him constantly while Pan Dan Chee drank; then he watched him while I slaked my thirst, and all the while the creature kept up a running fire of senseless chatter. He would take a word like calot, for instance, and keep repeating it over and over just as though he were carrying on a conversation. You could detect an interrogatory sentence by his inflection, as also the declarative, imperative, and exclamatory. All the time, he kept gesticulating like a Fourth of July orator.

At last he said, "You seem very stupid, but eventually you may understand. And now about food: You prefer your ulsio raw, I presume; or shall I cook it?"

"Ulsio!" exclaimed Pan Dan Chee. "You don't mean to say that you eat ulsio!"

"A great delicacy," said the creature.

"Have you nothing else?" demanded Pan Dan Chee.

"There is a little of Ro Tan Bim left," said the THING, "but he is getting a little bit high even for an epicure like me."

Pan Dan Chee looked at me. "I am not hungry," I said. "Come! Let's try to get out of here." I turned to the old man. "Which corridor leads out into the city?" I asked.

"You must rest," he said; "then I will show you. Lie down upon that couch and rest."

I HAD always heard that it is best to humor the insane; and as I was asking a favor of the creature, it seemed the wise thing to do now. Furthermore, both Pan Dan Chee and I were very tired; so we lay down on the couch and the old man drew up a bench and sat down beside us. He commenced to talk in a low, soothing voice.

"You are very tired," he said, over and over again monotonously, his great eyes fixed first upon one of us and then upon the other. I felt my muscles relaxing. I saw Pan Dan Chee's lids drooping. "Soon you will be asleep," whispered the old man of the pits. "You will sleep and sleep and sleep, perhaps for ages as have these others. You will only awaken when I tell you to or when I die—and I shall never die. You robbed Hor Kai Lan of his harness and weapons." He looked at me as he spoke. "Hor Kai Lan would be very angry were he to awaken and find that you have stolen his weapons, but Hor Kai Lan will not awaken. He has been asleep for so many ages that even I have forgotten. It is in my book, but what difference does it make? What difference does it make who wears the harness of Hor Kai Lan? No one will ever use his swords again; and, any way, when Ro Tan Bim is gone, maybe

I shall use Hor Kai Lan. Maybe I shall use you. Who knows?"

His voice was like a dreamy lullaby. I felt myself sinking into pleasant slumber. I glanced at Pan Dan Chee. He was fast asleep. And then the import of the THING'S words reached my reasoning mind. By hypnosis we were being condemned to a living death! I sought to shake the lethargy from me. I brought to bear what remained to me of my will power. Always my mind has been stronger than that of any Martian against whose mind I have pitted it.

The horror of the situation lent me strength: the thought of lying here for countless ages collecting the dust of the pits of Horz, or of being eaten by this snaggled toothed maniac! I put every ounce of my will power into a final, terrific effort to break the bonds that held me. It was even more devastating than a physical effort. I broke out into violent perspiration. I felt myself trembling from head to feet. Would I succeed?

The old man evidently realized the battle I was making for freedom, as he redoubled his efforts to hold me. His voice and his eyes wrapped themselves about me with almost physical force. The THING was sweating now, so strenuous were its endeavors to enthral my mind. Would it succeed?

IX

I WAS winning! I knew that I was winning! And the THING must have known it, too, for I saw it slipping its dagger from the sheath at its side. If it couldn't hold me in the semblance of death, it would hold me in actual death. I sought to wrench myself free from the last weakening tentacles of the THING'S malign mental forces before it could strike the fatal blow that would spell death for me and the equiv-

alent of death for Pan Dan Chee.

The dagger hand rose above me. Those hideous eyes glared down into mine, lighted by the hellish fires of insanity; and then, in that last instant, I won! I was free. I struck the dagger hand from me and leaped to my feet, the good long-sword of Hor Kai Lan already in my hand.

The THING cowered and screamed. It screamed for help where there was no help, and then it drew its sword. I would not defile the fine art of my swordsmanship by crossing blades with such as this. I recalled its boast that Pan Dan Chee and I would sleep until it awoke us or it died. That alone was enough to determine me—I would be no duelist, but an executioner and a liberator.

I cut once, and the foul head rolled to the stone floor of the pits of Horz. I looked at Pan Dan Chee. He was awakening. He rolled over and stretched; then he sat up and looked at me, questioningly. His eyes wandered to the torso and the head lying on the floor.

"What happened?" he asked.

Before I could reply, I was interrupted by a volley of sound coming from the chamber in which we were and from other chambers in the pits of Horz.

We looked quickly around us. Lids were being raised on innumerable chests, and cries were coming from others the lids of which were held down by the chests on top of them. Armed men were emerging—warriors in gorgeous harness. Women, rubbing their eyes and looking about them in bewilderment.

From the corridor others began to converge upon the chamber, guided by our light.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded a large man, magnificently

trapped. "Who brought me here? Who are you?" He looked around him, evidently bewildered, as though searching for some familiar face.

"Perhaps I can enlighten you?" I said. "We are in the pits of Horz. I have been here only a few hours, but if this dead thing on the floor spoke the truth some of you must have been here for ages. You have been held by the hypnotic power of this mad creature. His death has freed you."

The man looked down at the staring head upon the floor. "Lum Tar O!" he exclaimed. "He sent for me—asked me to come and see him on an important matter. And you have killed him. You must account to me—tomorrow. Now I must return to my guests."

There was a layer of dust on the man's face and body. By that I knew that he must have been here a long time, and presently my surmise was substantiated in a most dramatic manner.

The awakened men and women were forcing their way from the chests in which they had been kept. Some of those in the lower tiers were having difficulty in dislodging the chests piled on top of them. There was a great clattering and tumult as empty chests toppled to the floor. There was a babel of conversation. There was bewilderment and confusion.

A DUSTY nobleman crawled from one of the chests. Instantly he and the large man who had just spoken recognized one another. "What is the matter with you?" demanded the latter. "You are all covered with dust. Why did you come down? Come! I must get back to my guests."

The other shook his head in evident bewilderment. "Your guests, Kam Han Tor!" he exclaimed. "Did you expect your guests to wait twenty years for you



Pan Dan Chee unbuckled his sword to lay it at her feet

to return."

"Twenty years! What do you mean?"

"I was your guest twenty years ago. You left in the middle of the banquet and never returned."

"Twenty years? Are you mad!" exclaimed Kam Ham Tor. He looked at me and then at the grinning head upon the floor, and he commenced to weaken. I could see it.

The other man was feeling of his own face and looking at the dust he wiped from it. "You, too, are covered with dust," he said to Kam Han Tor.

Kam Han Tor looked down at his body and his harness; then he wiped his face and looked at his fingers. "Twenty years!" he exclaimed, and then he looked down at the head of Lum Tar O. "You vile beast!" he exclaimed. "I was your friend, and you did this to me!" He turned then to me. "Forget what I said. I did not understand. Whoever you may be, permit me to assure you that my sword is always in your service."

I bowed in acknowledgment.

"Twenty years!" repeated Kam Han Tor, as though he still could not believe it. "My great ship! It was to have sailed from the harbor of Horz the day following my banquet — the greatest ship that ever had been built. Now it is old, perhaps obsolete; and I have never seen it. Tell me—did it sail well? Is it still a proud ship?"

"I saw it as it sailed out upon Throxus," said the other. "It was a proud ship, indeed, but it never returned from that first voyage; nor was any word ever heard of it. It must have been lost with all hands."

Kam Han Tor shook his head sadly, and then he straightened up and squared his shoulders. "I shall build another," he said, "an even greater ship, to sail the mightiest of Barsoom's five seas."

Now I commenced to understand what I had suspected but could not believe. It was absolutely astounding. I was looking at and conversing with men who had lived hundreds of thousands of years ago, when Throxus and the other four oceans of ancient Mars had covered what are now the vast desert wastes of dead sea bottom; when a great merchant marine carried on the commerce of the fair skinned, blond race that had supposedly been extinct for countless ages.

I stepped closer to Kam Han Tor and laid a hand upon his shoulder. The men and women who had been released from Lum Tar O's malicious spell had gathered around us, listening. "I am sorry to disillusion you, Kam Han Tor," I said: "but you will build no ship, nor will any ship ever again sail Throxus."

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Who is to stop Kam Han Tor, brother of the jeddak, from building ships and sailing them upon Throxus?"

"There is no Throxus, my friend," I said.

"No Throxus? You are mad!"

"You have been here in the pits of Horz for countless ages," I explained, "and during that time the five great oceans of Barsoom have dried up. There are no oceans. There is no commerce. The race to which you belonged is extinct."

"Man, you are mad!" he cried.

"Do you know how to get out of these pits?" I asked—"out into the city proper—not up through the—" I was going to say citadel, but I recalled that there had been no citadel when these people had been lured to the pits.

"You mean not up through my palace?" asked Kam Han Tor.

"Yes," I said, "not up through your palace, but out toward the quays; then I can show you that there is no longer a Throxus."

"Certainly I know the way," he said. "Were these pits not built according to my plans!"

"Come, then," I said.

A MAN was standing looking down on the head of Lum Tar O. "If what this man says is true," he said to Kam Han Tor, "Lum Tar O must have lived many ages ago. How then could he have survived all these ages? How have we survived?"

"You were existing in a state of suspended animation," I said, "but as for Lun Tar O—that is a mystery."

"Perhaps not such a mystery after all," replied the man. "I knew Lum Tar O well. He was a weakling and a coward with the psychological reactions of the weakling and the coward. He hated all who were brave and strong, and these he wished to harm. His only friend was Lee Um Lo, the most famous embalmer the world had ever known; and when Lum Tar O died, Lee Um Lo embalmed his body. Evidently he did such a magnificent job that Lum Tar O's corpse never realized that Lum Tar O was dead, and went right on functioning as in life. That would account for the great span of years that the thing has existed—not a human being; not a live creature, at all; just a corpse the malign brain of which still functioned."

As the man finished speaking there was a commotion at the entrance to the chamber. A large man, almost naked, rushed in. He was very angry. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "What am I doing here? What are you all doing here? Who stole my harness and my weapons?"

It was then that I recognized him—Hor Kai Lan, whose metal I wore. He was very much excited, and I couldn't blame him much. He forced his way through the crowd, and the moment he

laid eyes upon me he recognized his belongings.

"Thief!" he cried. "Give me back my harness and my weapons!"

"I'm sorry," I said, "but unless you will furnish me with others, I shall have to keep these."

"Calot!" he fairly screamed. "Do you realize to whom you are speaking?" I am Hor Kai Lan, brother of the jeddak."

Kam Han Tor looked at him in amazement. "You have been dead over five hundred years, Hor Kai Lan," he exclaimed, "and so has your brother. My brother succeeded the last jeddak in the year 27M382J4."

"You have all been dead for ages," said Pan Dan Chee. "Even that calendar is a thing of the dead past."

I thought Hor Kai Lan was going to burst a blood vessel then. "Who are you?" he screamed. "I place you under arrest. I place you all under arrest. Ho! the guard!"

Kam Han Tor tried to pacify him, and at last succeeded in getting him to agree to accompany us to the quays to settle the question of the existence of Throxenus, which would definitely prove or disprove the unhappy truths I had been forced to explain to them.

As we started out, led by Kam Han Tor, I noticed the lid of a chest moving slightly. It was raised little by little, and I could see two eyes peering out through the crack made by the lifting of the lid; then suddenly a girl's voice cried, "John Carter, Prince of Helium! May my first ancestor be blessed!"

HAD my first ancestor suddenly materialized before my eyes, I could not have been more surprised than I was to hear my name from the interior of one of those chests in the pits of Horz.

As I started to investigate, the lid of the chest was thrown aside, and a girl

stepped out before me. This was more surprising than my first ancestor would have been, for the girl was Llana of Gathol!"

"Llana!" I cried, "what are you doing here?"

"I might ask you the same question, my revered progenitor," she shot back, with that lack of respect for my great age which had always characterized those closest to me in bonds of blood and affection.

Pan Dan Chee came forward rather open mouthed and goggle eyed. "Llana of Gathol!" he whispered as one might voice the name of a goddess. The roomful of anachronisms looked on more or less apathetically.

"Who is this person?" demanded Llana of Gathol.

"My friend, Pan Dan Chee of Horz," I explained.

Pan Dan Chee unbuckled his sword and laid it at her feet, an act which is rather difficult to explain by Earthly standards of conduct. It is not exactly an avowal of love or a proposal of marriage. It is, in a way, something even more sacred. It means that as long as life lasts that sword is at the service of him at whose feet it has been laid. A warrior may lay his sword at the feet of a man or a woman. It means lifetime loyalty. Where the object of that loyalty is a woman, the man may have something else in mind. I am sure that Pan Dan Chee did.

"Your friend acts with amazing celerity," said Llana of Gathol, but she stooped and picked up the sword and handed it back to Pan Dan Chee *hilt first!* which meant that she was pleased and accepted his offer of fealty. Had she simply refused it, she would have left the sword lying where it had been placed. Had she wished to spurn his offer, she would have returned his sword to him *point first*. That would have

been the final and deadly insult. I was glad that Llana of Gathol had returned Pan Dan Chee's sword hilt first, as I rather liked Pan Dan Chee. I was particularly glad that she had not returned it point first; as that would have meant that I, as the closest male relative of Llana of Gathol available, would have had to fight Pan Dan Chee, and I certainly didn't want to kill him.

"**W**ELL," interrupted Kam Han Tor, "this is all very interesting and touching, but can't we postpone it until we have gone down to the quays."

Pan Dan Chee bridled, and laid a hand on the hilt of his sword. I fore stalled any unseemly action on his part by suggesting that Kam Han Tor was wholly right and that our private affairs could wait until the matter of the ocean, so vital to all these other people, had been settled. Pan Dan Chee agreed; so we started again for the quay of ancient Horz.

Llana of Gathol walked at my side. "Now you may tell me," I said, "how you came to be in the pits of Horz."

"It has been many years," she began, "since you were in the kingdom of Okar in the frozen north. Talu, the rebel prince, whom you placed upon the throne of Okar, visited Helium once immediately thereafter. Since then, as far as I have ever heard, there has been no intercourse between Okar and the rest of Barsoom."

"What has all that to do with your being in the pits of Horz?" I demanded.

"Wait!" she admonished. "I am leading up to that. The general belief has been that the region surrounding the North Pole is but sparsely inhabited and by a race of black bearded yellow men only."

"Correct," I said.

"Not correct," she contradicted. "There is a nation of red men occupying

a considerable area, but at some distance from Okar. I am under the impression that when you were there the Okarians themselves had never heard of these people.

"Recently there came to the court of my father, Gahan of Gathol, a strange red man. He was like us, yet unlike. He came in an ancient ship, one which my father said must have been several hundred years old—obsolete in every respect. It was manned by a hundred warriors, whose harness and metal were unknown to us. They appeared fierce and warlike, but they came in peace and were received in peace.

"Their leader, whose name was Hin Abtol, was a pompous braggart. He was an uncultured boor, but, as our guest, he was accorded every courtesy. He said that he was Jeddak of Jeddaks of the North. My father said that he had thought that Talu held that title.

"He did," replied Hin Abtol, "until I conquered his country and made him my vassal. Now I am Jeddak of Jeddaks of the North. My country is cold and bleak outside our glazed cities. I would come south, looking for other lands in which my people may settle."

"My father told him that all the arable lands were settled and belonged to other nations which had held them for centuries.

"Hin Abtol merely shrugged superciliously. 'When I find what I wish,' he said, 'I shall conquer its people. I, Hin Abtol, take what I wish from the lesser peoples of Barsoom. From what I have heard they are all weak and effete; not hardy and warlike as are we Panars. We breed fighting men, in addition to which we have countless mercenaries. I could conquer all of Barsoom if I choose.'

"Naturally, that sort of talk disgusted my father, but he kept his temper, for Hin Abtol was his guest. I suppose that

Hin Abtol thought that my father feared him, his kind often believing that politeness is a sign of weakness. I know he once said to my father, 'You are fortunate that Hin Abtol is your friend. Other nations may fall before my armies, but you shall be allowed to keep your throne. Perhaps I shall demand a little tribute from you, but you will be safe. Hin Abtol will protect you.'

"I do not know how my father controlled his temper. I was furious. A dozen times I insulted the fellow, but he was too much of an egotistical boor to realize that he was being insulted; then came the last straw. He told Gahan of Gathol that he had decided to honor him by taking me, Llana of Gathol, as his wife. He had already bragged that he had seven!

"That," said my father, "is a matter that I cannot discuss with you. The daughter of Gahan of Gathol will choose her own mate."

"Hin Abtol laughed. 'Hin Abtol,' he said, 'chooses his wives—they have nothing to say about it.'

WELL, I had stood about all I could of the fellow, and so I decided to go to Helium and visit you and Dejah Thoris. My father decided that I should go in a small flier manned by twenty-five of his most trusted men, all members of my personal Guard.

"When Hin Abtol heard that I was leaving, he said that he would have to leave also—that he was returning to his own country but that he would come back for me. 'And I hope we have no trouble about it,' he said, 'for it would be too bad for Gathol if she made an enemy of Hin Abtol the Panar, Jeddak of Jeddaks of the North.'

"He left the day before I set out, and I did not change my plans because of his going. As a matter of fact, I had been planning on this visit for some time.

"My ship had covered scarce a hundred haads on the journey toward Helium, when we saw a ship rise from the edge of a sorapus forest ahead of us. It came slowly toward us, and presently I recognized its ancient lines. It was the ship of Hin Abtol the Panar, so-called Jeddak of Jeddaks of the North.

"When we were close enough it hailed us, and its captain told us that something had gone wrong with their compass and they were lost. He asked to come alongside that he might examine our charts and get his bearings. He hoped, he said, that we might repair his compass for him.

"Under the circumstances there was nothing to do but accede to his request, as one does not leave a disabled ship without offering aid. As I did not wish to see Hin Abtol, I went below to my cabin.

"I felt the two ships touch as that of the Panar came alongside, and an instant later I heard shouts and curses and the sounds of battle on the upper deck.

"I rushed up the ladder, and the sight that met my eyes filled me with rage. Nearly a hundred warriors swarmed over our deck from Hin Abtol's ancient tub. I have never seen greater brutality displayed by even the green men. The beasts ignored the commonest ethics of civilized warfare. Outnumbering us four to one, we had not a chance, but the men of Gathol put up a most noble fight, taking bloody toll of their attackers; so that Hin Abtol must have lost fully fifty men before the last of my brave Guard was slaughtered.

"The Panars threw my wounded overboard with the dead, not even vouchsafing them the *coup de grace*. Of all my crew, not one was left alive.

"Then Hin Abtol swaggered aboard.

'I told you,' he said, 'that Hin Abtol chooses his wives. It would have been better for you and for Gathol had you believed me.'

"'It would have been better for you,' I replied, 'had you never heard of Llana of Gathol. You may rest assured that her death will be avenged.'

"'I do not intend to kill you,' he said.

"'I shall kill myself,' I told him, 'before I shall mate with such an ulsio as you.'

"That made him angry, and he struck me. 'A coward as well as an ulsio,' I said.

"He did not strike me again, but he ordered me below. In my cabin I realized that the ship was again under way, and looking from the port I saw that it was heading north—north toward the frozen land of the Panars.

XI

"EARLY the following morning, a warrior came to my cabin. 'Hin Abtol commands that you come at once to the control room,' he said.

"'What does he want of me?' I demanded.

"'His navigator does not understand this ship or the instruments,' the fellow explained. 'He would ask you some questions.'

"I thought quickly. Perhaps I might frustrate Hin Abtol's plans if I could have a few minutes with the controls and the instruments, which I knew as well as we know the face of a loved one; so I followed the warrior above.

"Hin Abtol was in the control room with three of his officers. His face was a black scowl as I entered. 'We are off our course,' he snapped, 'and during the night we have lost touch with our own ship. You will instruct my officers as to these silly instruments that have confused them.' With that, he left

the control room.

"I looked around the horizon in every direction. The other ship was nowhere in sight. My plan was instantly formed. Had the other ship been able to see us, it could not have succeeded. I knew that if this ship on which I was a prisoner ever reached Panar I would have to take my own life to escape a fate worse than death. On the ground I might also meet death, but I would have a better chance to escape."

"What is wrong?" I asked one of the officers.

"Everything," he replied. "What is this?"

"A directional compass," I explained, "but what have you done to it? It is a wreck."

"Hin Abtol could not understand what it was for, which made him very angry, so he started taking it apart to see what was inside."

"He did a good job," I said "—of taking it apart. Now he, or another of you, should put it together again."

"We don't know how," said the fellow. "Do you?"

"Of course not."

"Then what are we to do?"

"Here is an ordinary compass," I told him. "Fly north by this, but first let me see what other harm has been done."

I pretended to examine all the other instruments and controls, and while I was doing so, I opened the buoyancy tank valves, and then jammed them so that they couldn't be closed.

"Everything is all right now," I said. "Just keep on north by this compass. You won't need the directional compass." I might have added that in a very short time they wouldn't need any compass as far as navigating this ship was concerned. Then I went down to my cabin.

"I knew that something would hap-

pen pretty soon, and sure enough it did. I could see from my porthole that we were losing altitude — just dropping slowly lower and lower—and directly another warrior came to my cabin and said that I was wanted in the control room again.

"Once more Hin Abtol was there. 'We are sinking,' he told me—a fact that was too obvious to need mention.

"I have noticed that for some time," I said.

"Well, do something about it!" he snapped. "You know all about this ship."

"I should think that a man who is thinking of conquering all of Barsoom ought to be able to fly a ship without the help of a woman," I said.

"He flushed at that, and then he drew his sword. 'You will tell us what is wrong,' he growled, 'or I'll split you open from your crown to your belly.'

"Always the chivalrous gentleman," I sneered, "but, even without your threat, I'll tell you what is wrong."

"Well, what is it?" he demanded.

"In fiddling around with these controls, either you or some equally stupid brute has opened the buoyancy tank valves. All you have to do is close them. We won't sink any lower then, but we'll never go any higher, either. I hope there are no mountains or very high hills between here and Panar."

"Where are the valves?" he asked.

"I showed him."

"They tried to close them, but I had made such a good job of jamming them that they couldn't, and we kept right on dropping down toward the other vegetation of a dead sea bottom."

HIN ABTOL was frantic. So were his officers. Here they were, thousands of haads from home—twenty-five men who had spent the greater parts of their lives in the glazed, hothouse cities

of the North Polar lands, with no knowledge, or very little, of the outside world or what nature of men, beasts, or other menaces might dispute their way toward home. I could scarcely refrain from laughing.

"As we lost altitude, I saw the towers of a city in the distance to the north of us, so did Hin Abtol. 'A city,' he said. 'We are fortunate. There we can find mechanics to repair our ship.'

"Yes," I thought, 'if you had come a million years ago, you would have found mechanics. They would have known nothing about repairing a flier, for fliers had not been invented then; but they could have built you a staunch ship wherein you could have sailed the five seas of ancient Barsoom,' but I said nothing.

"I had never been to Horz, but I knew that those towers rising in the distance could mark only that long dead city, and I wished the pleasure of witnessing Hin Abtol's disappointment after he had made the long and useless trek."

"You are a vindictive little rascal," I said.

"I'm afraid I am," admitted Llana of Gathol, "but, in this instance, can you blame me?"

I had to admit that I could not. "Go on," I urged. "Tell me what happened next."

"Will we never reach the end of these abominable pits!" exclaimed Kam Han Tor.

"You should know," said Pan Dan Chee, "you have said that they were built according to your plans."

"You are insolent," snapped Kam Han Tor. "You shall be punished."

"You have been dead a million years," said Pan Dan Chee. "You should lie down."

Kam Han Tor laid a hand upon the hilt of his long-sword. He was very angry, and I could not blame him, but

this was no time to indulge in the pleasure of a duel.

"Hold!" I said. "We have more important things to think of now than personal quarrels. Pan Dan Chee is in the wrong. He will apologize."

Pan Dan Chee looked at me in surprise and disapproval, but he pushed his sword back into its scabbard. "What John Carter, Prince of Helium, Warlord of Barsoom, commands me to do, I do," he said. "To Kam Han Tor I offer my apology."

Well, Kam Han Tor graciously accepted it, and I urged Llana of Gathol to go on with her story.

"The ship dropped gently to the ground without incurring further damage," she continued. Hin Abtol was undecided at first as whether to take all his men with him to the city, or leave some to guard the ship. Finally he concluded that it might be better for them all to remain together in the event they should meet with a hostile reception at the gates of the city. You would have thought, from the way he spoke, that twenty-five Panars could take any city in Barsoom.

"I shall wait for you here," I said. "There is no reason why I should accompany you to the city."

"And when I came back, you would be gone," he said. "You are a shrewd wench, but I am just a little bit shrewder. You will come with us."

"So I had to tramp all the way to Horz with them, and it was a very long and tiresome tramp. As we approached the city, Hin Abtol remarked that it was surprising that we saw no signs of life—no smoke, no movement along the avenue which we could see paralleling the plain upon which the city faced, the plain that had once been a mighty ocean.

"It was not until we had entered the city that he realized that it was dead

and deserted—but not entirely deserted, as we were soon to discover.

"We had advanced but a short distance up the main avenue when a dozen green warriors emerged from a building and fell upon the Panars. It might have been a good battle, John Carter, had you and two dozen of the warriors of your guard been pitted against the green men; but these Panars are no warriors unless the odds are all on their side. Of course they outnumbered the green men, but the great size and strength and the savage ferocity of the latter gave them the advantage over such weak foes-men.

"I saw but little of the fight. The contestants paid no attention to me. They were too engrossed with one another, and as I saw the head of a ramp close by, I dodged into it. The last I saw of the engagement revealed Hin Abtol running at the top of his speed back toward the plain with his men trailing behind him and the green men bringing up the rear. For the sublimation of speed I accord all honors to the Panars. They may not be able to fight, but they can run."

XII

KNOWING that the green men would return for their throats and that I must, therefore, hide, I descended the ramp," Llana went on. "It led into the pits beneath the city. I intended going in only far enough to avoid discovery from above and to have a head start should the green men come down the ramp in search of me, as I knew they might — they would not quickly forego an opportunity to capture a red woman for torture or slavery.

"I had gone down to the end of the ramp and a short distance along a corridor when I saw a dim light far ahead. I thought this worth investigating, as

I did not wish to be taken unexpectedly from behind and, perhaps, caught between two enemies, so I followed the corridor in the direction of the light, which I presently discovered was retreating. However, I continued to follow it, until presently it stopped in a room filled with chests.

"Looking in I saw a creature of most horrid mien—"

"Lum Tar O," I said. "The creature I killed."

"Yes," said Llana. "I watched him for a moment, not knowing what to do. A lighted torch illuminated the chamber. He carried another in his left hand. Presently he became alert. He seemed to be listening intently, then he crept from the room."

"That must have been when he first heard Pan Dan Chee and me," I suggested.

"I presume so," said Llana of Gathol. "Anyway, I was left alone in the room. If I went back the way I had come, I might run into the arms of a green man. If I followed the horrid creature I had just seen, I would doubtless be in just as bad a fix. If I only had a place to hide until it would be safe to come out of the pits the way I had entered!

"The chests looked inviting. One of them would provide an excellent hiding place. It was just by the merest chance that the first one I opened was empty. I crept into it and lowered the lid above me. The rest you know."

"And now you are coming out of the pits," I said, as we started up a ramp at the top of which I could see daylight.

"In a few moments," said Kam Han Tor, "we shall be looking upon the broad waters of Throxenus."

I shook my head. Do not be too disappointed," I said.

"Are you and your friend in league to perpetrate a hoax upon me?" demanded Kam Han Tor. "Only yester-

day I saw the ships of the fleet lying at anchor off the quay. Do you think me a fool, that you tell me there is no longer any ocean where an ocean was yesterday, where it has been since the creation of Barsoom? Oceans do not disappear overnight, my friend."

There was a murmur of approval from those of the fine company of nobles and their women who were within ear-shot. They were loath to believe what they did not wish to believe and what, I realized, must have seemed an insult to their intelligence.

Put yourself in their place. Perhaps you live in San Francisco. You go to bed one night. When you awaken, a total stranger tells you that the Pacific Ocean has dried up and that you may walk to Honolulu or Guam or the Philippines. I'm quite sure that you wouldn't believe him.

AS we came up into the broad avenue that lead to the ancient sea front of Horz, that assembly of gorgeously trapped men and women looked about them in dumbfounded astonishment upon the crumbling ruins of their once proud city.

"Where are the people?" demanded one. "Why is the Avenue of Jeddaks deserted?"

"And the palace of the jeddak!" exclaimed another. "There are no guards."

No one commented, as they pushed on eagerly toward the quay. Before they got there they were already straining their eyes out across a barren desert of dead sea bottom where once the waters of Throxenus had rolled.

In silence they continued on to the Avenue of Quays. They simply could not believe the testimony of their own eyes. I cannot recall ever having felt sorrier for any of my fellow men than

I did at that moment for these poor people.

"It is gone," said Kam Han Tor in a scarcely audible whisper.

A woman sobbed. A warrior drew his dagger and plunged it into his own heart.

"And all our people are gone," said Kam Han Tor. "Our very world is gone."

They stood there looking out across that desert waste; behind them a dead city that, in their last yesterday, had teemed with life and youth and energy.

And then a strange thing happened. Before my eyes, Kam Han Tor commenced to shrink and crumble. He literally disintegrated, escaped the leather of his harness. His weapons clattered to the pavement and lay there in a little pile of dust that had been Kam Han Tor, the brother of a jeddak.

LLANA of Gathol pressed close to me and seized my arm. "It is horrible!" she whispered. "Look! Look at the others!"

I looked about me. Singly, in groups of two or three, the men and women of ancient Horz were returning to the dust from which they had sprung—"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust!"

"For all the ages that they have lain in the pits of Horz," said Pan Dan Chee, "this disintegration has been going slowly on. Only Lum Tar O's obscene powers gave them a semblance of life. With that removed final dissolution came quickly."

"That must be the explanation," I said. "It is well that it is so, for these people never could have found happiness in the Barsoom of today—a dying world, so unlike the glorious world of Barsoom in the full flush of her prime, with her five oceans, her great cities, her happy, prosperous peoples, who, if history speaks the truth, had finally

overthrown all the war lords and war mongers and established peace from pole to pole."

"No," said Llana of Gathol, "they could never have been happy again. Did you notice what handsome people they were? And the color of their skins was the same as yours, John Carter. But for their blond hair they might have been from your own Earth."

"There are many blond people on Earth," I told her. "Maybe, after all the races of Earth have intermarried for many ages, we shall develop a race of red men, as has Barsoom. Who knows?"

Pan Dan Chee was standing looking adoringly at Llana of Gathol. He was so obvious that it was almost painful, and I could see that it annoyed Llana even while it pleased her.

"Come," I said. "Nothing is to be gained by standing here. My flier is in a courtyard nearby. It will carry three. You will come with me, Pan Dan Chee? I can assure you a welcome in Helium and a post of some nature in the army of the jeddak."

Pan Dan Chee shook his head. "I must go back to the Citadel," he said.

"To Ho Ran Kim and death," I reminded him.

"Yes, to Ho Ran Kim and death," he said.

"Don't be a fool, Pan Dan Chee," I said. "You have acquitted yourself honorably. You cannot kill me, and I know you would not kill Llana of Gathol. We shall go away, carrying the secret of the forgotten people of Horz with us, no matter what you do; but you must know that neither of us would use our knowledge to bring harm to your people. Why then go back to your death uselessly? Come with us."

He looked straight into the eyes of Llana of Gathol. "Is it your wish that

I come with you?" he asked.

"If the alternative means your death," she replied, "then it is my wish that you come with us."

A wry smile twisted Pan Dan Chee's lips, but evidently he saw a ray of hope in her non-committal answer, for he said to me, "I thank you, John Carter. I will go with you. My sword is yours, always."

XIII

I HAD no difficulty in locating the courtyard where I had landed and left my flier. As we approached it, I saw a number of dead men lying in the avenue. They were sprawled in the grotesque postures of death. Some of them were split wide open from their crowns to their bellies. "The work of green men," I said.

"These were the men of Hin Abtol," said Llana of Gathol.

We counted seventeen corpses before we reached the entrance to the courtyard. When I looked in, I stopped, appalled—my flier was not there; but five more dead Panars lay near where it had stood.

"It is gone," I said.

"Hin Abtol," said Llana of Gathol. "The coward abandoned his men and fled in your flier. Only two of his warriors succeeded in accompanying him."

"Perhaps he would have been a fool to remain," I said. "He would only have met the same death that they met."

"In like circumstances, John Carter would have been a fool, then," she shot back.

Perhaps I would, for the truth of the matter is that I like to fight. I suppose it is all wrong, but I cannot help it. Fighting has been my profession during all the life that I can recall. I fought all during the Civil War in the Confederate Army. I fought in other

wars before that. I will not bore you with my autobiography. Suffice it to say that I have always been fighting. I do not know how old I am. I recall no childhood. I have always appeared to be about thirty years old. I still do. I do not know from whence I came, nor if I were born of woman as are other men. I have, so far as I know, simply always been. Perhaps I am the materialization of some long dead warrior of another age. Who knows? That might explain my ability to cross the cold, dark void of space which separates Earth from Mars. I do not know.

Pan Dan Chee broke the spell of my reverie. "What now?" he asked.

"A long walk," I said. "It is fully four thousand haads from here to Gathol, the nearest friendly city." That would be the equivalent of fifteen hundred miles—a very long walk.

"And only this desert from which to look for subsistence?" asked Pan Dan Chee.

"There will be hills," I told him. "There will be deep little ravines where moisture lingers and things grow which we can eat, but there may be green men, and there will certainly be banths and other beasts of prey. Are you afraid, Pan Dan Chee?"

"Yes," he said, "but only for Llana of Gathol. She is a woman—it is no adventure for a woman. Perhaps she could not survive it."

Llana of Gathol laughed. "You do not know the women of Helium," she said, "and still less one in whose veins flows the blood of Dejah Thoris and John Carter. Perhaps you will learn before we have reached Gathol." She stooped and stripped the harness and weapons of a dead Panar from his corpse and buckled them upon herself. The act was more eloquent than words.

"Now we are three good sword

arms," said Pan Dan Chee with a laugh, but we knew that he was not laughing at Llana of Gathol but from admiration of her.

And so we set out, the three of us, on that long trek toward far Gathol—Llana of Gathol and I, of one blood and two worlds, and Pan Dan Chee of still another blood and of an extinct world. We might have seemed ill assorted, but no three people could have been more in harmony with each other—at least at first.

FOR five days we saw no living thing.

We subsisted entirely upon the milk of the mantalia plant, which grows apparently without water, distilling its plentiful supply of milk from the products of the soil, the slight moisture in the air, and the rays of the sun. A single plant of this species will give eight or ten quarts of milk a day. They are scattered across the dead sea bottoms as though by a beneficent Providence, giving both food and drink to man and beast.

My companions might still have died of thirst or starvation had I not been with them, for neither knew that the quite ordinary looking plants which we occasionally passed carried in their stems and branches this life-giving fluid.

We rested in the middle of the day and slept during the middle portions of the nights, taking turns standing guard—a duty which Llana of Gathol insisted on sharing with us.

When we lay down to rest on the sixth night, Llana had the first watch; and as I had the second, I prepared to sleep at once. Pan Dan Chee sat up and talked with Llana.

As I dozed off, I heard him say, "May I call you my princess?"

That, on Barsoom is the equivalent of a proposal of marriage on Earth.

I tried to shut my ears and go to sleep, but I could not but hear her reply.

"You have not fought for me yet," she said, "and no man may presume to claim a woman of Helium until he has proved his metal."

"I have had no opportunity to fight for you," he said.

"Then wait until you have," she said shortly, "and now good-night."

Thus she lay down to sleep.

I thought she was a little too short with him. Pan Dan Chee is a nice fellow, and I was sure that he would give a good account of himself when the opportunity arose. She didn't have to treat him as though he were scum. But then, women have their own ways. As a rule they are unpleasant ways, but they seem the proper ways to win men, so I suppose they must be all right.

Pan Dan Chee walked off a few paces and lay down on the other side of Llana of Gathol. We always managed to keep her between us for her greater protection.

I was awakened later on by a shout and a hideous roar. I leaped to my feet to see Llana of Gathol down on the ground with a huge banth on top of her, and at that instant Pan Dan Chee leaped full upon the back of the mighty carnivore.

It all happened so quickly that I can scarcely visualize it all. I saw Pan Dan Chee dragging at the great beast in an effort to pull it from Llana's body, and at the same time he was plunging his dagger into its side. The banth

John Carter is the most famous space traveler ever to spring from the pages of science fiction. Twenty years ago, when he first staggered into a weird cave in the Arizona desert and experienced what seemed to him to be death, he was "born" as the most romantic, swashbuckling Martian hero of all time.

In that weird cavern filled with eerie whispers and ghostly manifestations, John Carter experienced a strange paralysis. With a mighty effort of will he snapped the invisible bonds that bound him

was roaring hideously as it tried to fight off Pan Dan Chee and at the same time retain its hold upon Llana.

I sprang close in with my short-sword, but it was difficult to find an opening which did not endanger either Llana or Pan Dan Chee. It must have been a very amusing sight, as the four of us were threshing around on the ground, all mixed up, and the banth was roaring and Pan Dan Chee was cursing like a trooper when he wasn't trying to tell Llana of Gathol how much he loved her.

But at last I got an opening, and drove my short-sword into the heart of the banth. With a final scream and a convulsive shudder, the beast rolled over and lay still.

When I tried to lift Llana from the ground, she leaped to her feet. "Pan Dan Chee!" she cried. "Is he all right? Was he hurt?"

"Of course I'm all right," said Pan Dan Chee, "but you? How badly are you hurt?"

"I am not hurt at all. You kept the brute so busy it didn't have a chance to maul me."

"Thanks be to my ancestors!" exclaimed Pan Dan Chee fervently. Suddenly he turned on her. "Now," he said, "I have fought for you. What is your answer?"

Llana of Gathol shrugged her pretty shoulders. "You have not fought a man," she said, "—just a little banth."

Well, I never did understand women.

and leaped to his feet—to stand as naked as the day he was born beside his own "dead" body. And in a few moments he stood staring up at the stars—at Mars, winking redly on the horizon. A mighty longing shook him.

Then, in an unthinkable moment of utter cold, he spanned the gulf, and found himself lying in hot sunshine on the deserts of Mars.

Since that day, he has returned many times to tell Edgar Rice Burroughs of his adventures. You have just read his latest—and there'll be more!

Scientific



SOME YEARS AGO, IN RUSSIA, DR. S. TCHENCHULIN KEPT THE SEVERED HEAD OF A DOG ALIVE FOR MORE THAN THREE HOURS BY ELECTRICAL STIMULI.



DR. ALEXIS CARREL,
ROCKEFELLER INSTITUTE
SCIENTIST, HAS MANAGED
TO KEEP A CHICKEN HEART
ALIVE FOR TWENTY-
SEVEN YEARS THROUGH
ARTIFICIAL MEANS.



WILL MAN SOMEDAY CREATE
LIFE BY MEANS OF HUGE
ELECTRICAL GENERATORS ACTING
ON PROTOPLASMIC AMOEBAE?

Mysteries

LIFE FROM ELECTRICITY

By JACK WEST

What is the mysterious "force" we call Life? Is it really electricity? Or is electricity the cause, Life the result?

In Russia a few years ago, Dr. S. J. Tchenchulin kept the severed head of a dog alive for more than three hours, while his colleague, Dr. A. Kubliako, kept a human heart going for more than thirty hours outside of the body that owned it. Spectacular experiments these were, but at the same time they are bristling with scientific importance. They give us somewhat of an inkling into that greatest of all mysteries—life.

Some twenty years ago, Dr. Alexis Carrel, world famous surgeon of the Rockefeller Institute, set out to determine just what life power was held in the tiny cells which go to make up our body.

He knew that when a man dies the hair and nails continue to grow. He wondered about the Russians mentioned above and asked himself, "When a man or any other form of animal dies, does he die completely, or do certain parts of his body continue to live? If a cell or a group of cells he removed from the body of a dead man, could these cells continue to live after the original body was dead and buried? Could this be the key to eternal life for the human being?"

In an attempt to answer these questions Dr. Carrel has in his laboratory some cells from the heart of a chicken embryo which he has managed to keep alive for twenty-seven years. This is a tremendous thing when one stops to consider the fact that a five-year-old chicken is facing old age! Dr. Carrel has also kept tissue cells from rats, mice, guinea pigs and human beings growing in his laboratory for many years. Strangely enough cells from brains live only a short time, but most other cells do very well, at least as well as the chick's heart.

From his experiments Dr. Carrel concludes that human cells are potentially immortal; detached, they might, under favorable conditions, go on living forever!

"How come?" you ask. Dr. Carrel offers as a theory the fact that a single cell in a semi-liquid state is able to discharge its poisons (necessary waste products of life) entirely into this liquid outside itself, while in the body these poisons cannot escape and pile up causing decay and eventually death.

Says Dr. Carrel: "The human body is composed

of cells that are potentially immortal but is itself subject to senility and death. Death is apparently the price we pay for brains, for the flesh seems to be immortal but brains are lethal and doomed to kill their possessor in the end."

Another man who has delved into the mystery of life is Dr. George W. Crile of the Cleveland Clinic. Taking the brain tissues from a freshly killed animal, Dr. Crile reduced them to ashes electrically. He extracted salts and other elements and added protein and other elements and chemicals. He treated this compound with electricity and created a group of strange new life-like cells, unclassified by science.

Dr. Crile believes that life is closely connected with electricity. His experiments with the simple amoeba lend reason to this theory. Dr. Crile, using very sensitive electrical instruments, showed that an amoeba had an electrical charge of about one-sixtieth of a volt. Through a microscopic electrical apparatus attached to an amoeba, enough positive-current was introduced into the simple animal to cancel its own negative charge. Death followed instantly! Dr. Crile found that if the current was either more or less than the charge of the amoeba, the result would not be fatal. The simple creature was harmed only when its electrical charge became completely neutral!

Dr. Crile suggests that there are continuous electrical currents coming from all living things such as plants and animals. Each cell can be considered as a battery and the cells vary in their capacity to generate electricity. The flow of current is known to be strongest from young cells, weaker from old cells, and entirely lacking from dead cells! Dr. Crile believes that loss of this electric elixir, by poisons, injury, or wearing out constitutes the mystery of death. Man can live as long as he remains electric. Once the electricity is gone, he dies!

This is where the experiments have ended. What lies ahead no one knows. Will man discover the mystery of life? Can we learn more about the mysterious "electricity" of life? Will we ever be able to control it, store it up, and possibly learn how to make life eternal? And when this is accomplished, what will a world without death be like?

The Man Who Lived

by David Wright O'Brien

Into Percival Piff's shaking hands Fate thrust a newspaper—dated one week hence! But beware Fate, practical joker, when she bears you gifts!

"IT'S not that I'm afraid. It's just, well—"

Percival Piff choked off the remainder of his sentence, shuffling his feet uneasily and attempting to avoid his wife's cold stare.

"A coward, afraid of the dark!" his spouse Matilda stormed contemptuously. She placed her large red hands on her wide hips and glared balefully at him. "Afraid to go down in the basement just because it's dark down there!"

Mr. Piff winced, his frail body instinctively tensing in defense from her scorn, his mild blue eyes regarding the packages lying on the floor. The packages Matilda wanted him to take down to the cellar. He tried a last appeal.

"I don't like this house, Matilda," he protested. "I'm sorry we ever moved here. The place gives me the creeps, especially the basement."

"We haven't even been living here a week," Matilda's voice was growing shriller. "And you haven't done a thing to help us get settled."

Matilda paused to point dramatically to the disarranged furniture.

"If you'd help straighten things, carry packages, and make yourself generally useful, we could settle down and



Next Week



An eerie tingling engulfed Percival Piff, and for an instant he seemed to be two men

enjoy this splendid home. After all, this bungalow once belonged to a very noted scientist. We should feel honored to live here. But instead, you have to grouse about everything."

Mr. Piff opened his mouth to protest, but his wife continued before he could get a word out.

"Here it is the third day of September," she threw her paw wide in a gesture to include a desk calendar, "and we aren't even near to being settled!"

Matilda paused to point dramatically.

Mr. Piff's features didn't have to register resignation. He was born with that emotion already stamped there. But the expressive shrug of his shoulders admitted defeat, and he stooped to pick up the packages Matilda wanted removed to the basement.

Grimly triumphant, Matilda pushed a lank moist strand of hair from her flushed fat face and assisted her husband, piling package after package into his arms until he was scarcely able to stand beneath their weight.

Mr. Piff made his way unsteadily to the door leading to the cellar, and proceeded cautiously down the steps. At the first landing he paused, feeling the damp air of the stygian pit rushing up to his nostrils. Damp air with an exceedingly peculiar odor, like that of old chemicals.

Mr. Piff could never be described as a rugged individual. His general appearance was that of a very small, very drab and terribly weary beanpole. He was as frail as Matilda was fat. The packages were heavy, and the cellar beneath him was dismally dark.

"Dark and dank," thought Mr. Piff, who had read a few mystery stories. "I don't like it."

The cellar was where the obscure chemico-physicist—the poor chap Matilda had referred to as the "distinguished scientist"—had kept his lab-

oratories when he'd lived in the bungalow. Mr. Piff decided that the peculiar odor must be the memory of those chemicals lingering on.

"Percival!" Matilda's sharp voice came ringing to his ears. "Have you taken those bundles down yet?"

M R. PIFF gazed apprehensively at the darkness waiting at the bottom of those steps. He sighed again.

"Taking them down now, dear," he shouted in reply.

Bracing his slight shoulders, Mr. Piff moved cautiously down the steps, wishing that there was some light to guide him as the darkness folded over him like a heavy black cloak.

He shuddered. The dampness was chilling. He moved slowly down four more steps. Then he was standing at the bottom, on the cellar floor.

The odor of old chemicals was even stronger now. Mr. Piff waited, giving his eyes time to accustom themselves to the darkness, recalling that Matilda wanted the packages placed in the farthest corner from the stairs.

Even when he was able to half discern objects in the murky gray light, Mr. Piff hesitated about moving toward that corner. For it was darker, far darker than any other spot in the cellar. It was totally, terrifyingly black.

"As if," Mr. Piff told himself, remembering his mystery tales again, "something lurked there, waiting!"

Mr. Piff struggled with the temptation to chuck the packages immediately and get the hell out of there as quickly as his quaking knees would permit him. But the memory of Matilda, waiting sternly up there, stopped him.

He shuddered, stepping across the damp stone floor. Now he was less than five feet from that darkened nook. It was still hidden in ebony gloom. He inched a few steps closer to it. Closer,

Closer, and sweat stood out on his brow. He wanted to faint, to scream; in the reverse order, of course. But he did neither. He advanced even closer.

He took a deep breath and stepped into the blackness.

Dropping packages right and left in a veritable frenzy to be gone, Mr. Piff was at first unaware of anything but the blackness that surrounded him. But in less than four more seconds, he was aware of something else. He was conscious of an odd, eerie tingling that seemed to have taken control of his entire body.

Tingling — like electric vibrations running through his tissues. It was enough to startle the upper plate out of a stronger man; and Percival Piff, being a mouse, screamed once and ran hell-bent for the stairs.

He gained the first landing in what almost amounted to a leap, and in another six seconds was back in his living room, slamming the door behind him, leaning breathlessly against it and opening and closing his eyes.

The strange electric tingling was almost gone, but he could still feel it by proxy. He gave way to spasms of long, violent shudders. Tremulously, he sucked in his breath and looked around for Matilda.

Matilda was nowhere to be seen.

Then he thought again of that tingling. It was horrible. Something—Mr. Piff was now certain—lurked there in the darkened corner. Something beside the packages he'd dropped!

Weakly, Mr. Piff staggered from the living room into the kitchen. There was still no sign of Matilda. She must have stepped out to a neighbors, or into the yard. Gratefully, he slumped into a kitchen chair.

"I don't like this house," he moaned sorrowfully. "There's something awful about it. I knew it all along. I

know it now!"

Then, clasping his hand to his brow, Mr. Piff got his first shock.

A BSTRACTEDLY, his gaze had included his cuff. Subconsciously, his mind had registered its appearance. With a start he leaped to his feet, gazing wildly up and down his body.

He was clothed in his blue serge suit —which was not incredible. *But when he had entered the cellar, he had been wearing his gray tweed suit*—which was impossible!

Mr. Piff fought for a grip on himself. His memory must have slipped from his scare. Yes. That was it. He laughed aloud, weakly, and without conviction. His memory had slipped.

"Ha, ha," said Mr. Piff uneasily, "what a joke on myself!"

He had no sooner finished his sentence when the doorbell rang. Thankful for its interruption, Mr. Piff dashed to the living room and opened the door—to admit Matilda, arms full of groceries.

For the first time in twelve years, Mr. Piff was glad to see his wife. He said so.

"Gosh, dear," said Mr. Piff. "I'm glad you came back. You didn't tell me you were going shopping. Must have done it in a rush."

Matilda, depositing the bundles on the telephone table, gave him a long, searching gaze.

"What are you babbling about?" she inquired coldly. "I've been out all day, and you know it."

It came to Mr. Piff at that moment that Matilda couldn't possibly have changed her clothes—she had been wearing a housecoat when he'd seen her last—and gone out shopping in the short time since she'd shouted down the basement steps at him!

And, besides, didn't she just say that

she'd been out *all day?*

"What are you babbling about?" Matilda repeated sharply.

"N-n-n-n-othing," stammered Mr. Piff in confusion. "Just wanted to tell you that I took those packages down as you asked me."

"Down where?"

"Down," said Mr. Piff, "in the cellar. In the corner, as you asked me."

Matilda placed her paws on her ample hips, a favorite gesture of hers.

"What," she demanded, "is wrong with you? If you weren't such a sissy, I'd swear you'd been drinking. You took those packages downstairs last week!"

Mr. Piff wheeled, looking wildly about the living room. He hadn't thought to notice any change in its appearance before. But now he could see—and marvel. The rugs were all carefully laid, and the furniture—which had been in disorder the last time he'd looked—was neatly arranged!

"Things have changed!" he gasped. "Everything was different ten minutes ago. You were different. I was different. The house was different!"

Fear clutching at his bosom, he staggered across the room to the desk calendar. It read—"September 10th!"

A week had passed without Percival Piff's personal knowledge!

Mr. Piff wasn't certain how, or why, or what had happened. But whatever it was, one thing was clear. Something horrible had taken place. He felt weak, giddy, watery in the knees.

"Rip Van Winkle Piff," he muttered hoarsely.

"What's that you said?" demanded Matilda.

"Nothing, nothing," Mr. Piff replied dazedly. "I just feel a little weak, that's all." He slumped down on the sofa.

"Huh!" snorted Matilda. "Weak, in-

deed! I'd like to know from what!" And with that burst of warm sympathy, she left the room.

After many minutes of exhausted meditation on the sofa, Mr. Piff's conscious mind arrived at an explanation for what had happened. It was simple enough. He was the victim of amnesia. He'd had a loss of memory that lasted a week.

BUT that was merely his conscious mind speaking for him.

Deep back in the darkened corners of his brain, Mr. Piff's subconscious was hard at work, tossing devilish speculations at him with satanic insistence.

"Amnesia!" these tiny voices scoffed. "A likely explanation! Bah!"

It was to no avail that Mr. Piff tried to silence these tiny voices.

"Go on, Piff," these subconscious demons urged, "find out the real truth. Amnesia, bunk!"

Quite suddenly, and without his will directing it, Mr. Piff found his steps taking him across the room to the door leading to the cellar. A minute later and he was once again moving cautiously across the damp darkness of the cellar floor. He hadn't wanted to come here again. It was as though some hidden power greater than his fear had led him back to the place.

If the sight of that black cellar corner had frightened Mr. Piff on his first visit, he was thoroughly terrified by it now. The odor of old chemicals was once again strong in his nostrils, and it was all he could do to force his legs to carry him across to the corner.

He was less than three feet from the stygian curtained corner, less than three feet now from its eerie blackness, and sweat stood out on his brow, trickling slowly down his sharp nose.

Breathing a prayer of supplication, he shut his eyes and stepped forward.

It happened again.

The odd, electric tingling had hit him instantly upon stepping into the ebony depths of the corner. And again it flooded his tissues, vibrating through his entire body. Forcing himself, by supreme heroics of will, to remain stationary in the corner, Mr. Piff allowed the weird current to do its damnedest.

At last, stumbling and gasping, his heart hammering with the force of a riveter's, Mr. Piff burst out from the darkened nook and groped a hasty retreat to the stairs. A moment later, and he was again inside the living room, with the door slammed tight behind him. For the second time, he leaned against the comforting support of the wall, trying to force his nerves to calm somewhat, keeping his eyes shut tight.

"Well!" the voice belonged to Matilda, and Mr. Piff opened his eyes to see her standing before him, dressed in a housecoat and glaring balefully.

"You certainly took enough time about putting those packages down there, worm," she spat contemptuously. Mr. Piff, however, wasn't paying the slightest attention to her tone of voice. It was *what* she said, not *how* she said it, that made him go weak in the knees.

He noticed her housecoat next, and a wild glance showed him that he himself was dressed once more in his gray tweed suit! Another terrified glance revealed the disordered arrangement of the furniture, the fact that the rugs were not yet laid!

Matilda was continuing her diatribe. But Mr. Piff paid no attention to it. Dazedly, he crossed the room to the desk calendar, glanced at it, and clutched a chair for support.

It was September 3rd again! Whereas before he had gone back into the cellar, it was *September 10th*!

Somehow, he was back a week again. It hadn't been amnesia! A week, just

like that!

Mr. Piff threw a hand to his fevered brow and stood there, swaying weakly back and forth. The tiny demons, rulers of his subconscious, were gloating again.

"Ahaaaa, Piff! We told you so," said the tiny voices. "Amnesia, bunk! You traveled a week ahead, that's what you did. And now you're back in the present again!"*

Muttering angrily, Matilda strode out of the room. But Mr. Piff didn't notice her exit. He sank down on the divan, letting his head rest in his hands.

CHAPTER II

Things to Come

MRR. PIFF did a great deal of thinking. Straight through dinner, throughout the evening, and into the early hours of the morning he struggled to find a solution to this astonishing enigma. For a few hours he had argued around the idea that he might be going mad. Might already be as nutty as a fruit cake. But the tiny voices in the back of his brain erased such notions.

"Try it again," the voices insisted. "Try it again and see!"

So Mr. Piff, armed with a flashlight, had donned his bathrobe and slippers, and descended once again to the cellar. The place had lost its terror for him; due, perhaps, to the fact that it had become a brain-racking problem. Instead of the fear he had felt on his other two visits, he now moved through the

Eddington postulates that our time-sense is based on a sensory perception of entropy; which term, although usually associated with thermodynamics, is more generically the measure of the "running-down" of the universe. By isolating a portion of space and changing the rate of entropy within that portion, we thereby change the rate of elapse of time within that portion. Undoubtedly this is what happens to Mr. Piff when he undergoes the peculiar vibration.—Ed.

dark gloom of the place with a sort of awe.

Nevertheless, he hesitated for a few moments before playing the beam of his flashlight into the darkened corner. Mr. Piff was still very much uncertain as to what might be lurking behind that stygian veil.

He closed his eyes and shot the beam toward the corner. Nothing happened, so he opened his eyes again and looked to see what would be revealed.

There was nothing in the corner save the packages he'd dropped there—and a small, box-like object about the size of a small radio. The object was covered by a small tarpaulin.

Mr. Piff gained a certain measure of confidence from this.

"Well, well," he murmured throatily. "Well, well," and he advanced to the corner.

With a quick gesture, like a man peeling a piece of adhesive plaster from a hairy arm, Mr. Piff reached forward and jerked the tarpaulin from the radio-sized object. The resulting cloud of dust left him blinded and choking for a moment or two.

At last he fanned the dust from his eyes. The object even looked like a radio. Except that it was steel, chrome steel, and had very different dials on the front of it, Mr. Piff would have been sure it was a radio. The thing was humming, a faint sort of buzzing hum. Mr. Piff reached out and snapped off a button on the side. The humming ceased abruptly.

He stepped closer to it then, and bent over an engraved plate on the top.

The plate read, "Fleming's Future-scope."

Then Mr. Piff remembered the name. Fleming, of course! Fleming was the chemist chap who had lived here before.

"Must have belonged to Fleming,"

observed Mr. Piff with the air of a detective who has unearthed a damning bit of evidence. Then he knit his brows.

"Futurescope?" He gazed thoughtfully at it, thinking, while little chills held races up and down his spine, of his experiences with this machine. Thinking of how they were definitely hinged on the future.

"Gosh," he gulped throatily, "then this accounts for it all!"

Mr. Piff's brain was assembling all the facts, relegating them to their proper status, and drawing an utterly logical, though quite unbelievable, conclusion. This thing, this tiny chrome steel box, radio, or what-have-you, had transported him into the future—and had returned him to the present!

IT was preposterous. It couldn't be true. Anyone with more brains than Percival Piff would have known it couldn't be true. But Mr. Piff was used to believing things on their face value. He had been tossed into the future, then back into the present. This thing was called a Futurescope. That was enough for Mr. Piff. As far as he was concerned, that was that.

He stared long and thoughtfully at the little box as if expecting it to explain its workings verbally to him. Then he snapped on the button. The buzzing hum resumed promptly. After a moment, the same tingling sensations as before assailed him.

"Aha!" smiled Mr. Piff. "This is going to be fun."

He chuckled, feeling the tingling race through his body. Now that he knew what this was all about, now that he had some idea of what was going to happen, there was no fear attached to the process at all.

After waiting what seemed to be the right length of time, Mr. Piff stepped away from the machine. Crossing the

cellar, he climbed the stairs leading to the living room. Once inside his house proper, again, he looked around expectantly.

Sure enough, the furniture was arranged and the rugs were down. He looked down to see that he was even wearing a different set of pajamas.

Just to make certain, Mr. Piff crossed the room again and looked at the desk calendar. He was once more a week into the future. He shook his head.

"Tsk, tsk, what won't they think of next?"

Mr. Piff looked at his watch. It was six o'clock. Should he go to work, when the time came to do so in another hour, here in the future, or go to work *last week*; which, although highly complicated, was really *this week*? He decided to return to the present, and turned, to descend to the cellar again, when he heard a thump on the back porch. The sound informed him that the morning paper had just been delivered.

"Next week's newspaper," thought Mr. Piff. Then, with the force of a plank swung against the base of the skull, a thought struck him. It was staggering. *That newspaper contained news and knowledge that would not be known to anyone but Mr. Piff for a week!*

"Gosh," gasped Mr. Piff, all a-tremble, "gosh!"

Hastily, he padded out onto the back porch and brought in the paper. Spreading it out on the kitchen table, he sat down to read it.

He had no sooner glanced at the headlines than a voice shrilled at his ears—Matilda's, of course. He cursed himself in a mild sort of way for having slammed the kitchen door on coming in from the porch. It had evidently awakened her.

"Percival Piff, what *are* you doing up this hour?"

Mr. Piff shuddered, lifted his head. "Nothing dear, just reading next week's news."

The words had come out before he thought. And now he bit his tongue in remorse. Matilda's reply was immediate, and seething with indignation.

"You snake!" her voice shrilled down to him. "You miserable snake! Deliberately thumping around to wake me up, and then getting smart-alecky about it!"

He could hear sounds of Matilda's ample bulk bounding out of bed.

"You wait right there." Her voice was ominous. "I'll be right down to settle this, here and now!"

TERRIFIED, Mr. Piff clutched the newspaper and raced into the living room. Then he plummeted down the cellar steps, paper still clutched to his breast. In an instant he was standing beside the *Futurescope*. It was still buzzing.

He felt the tingling take command of his body. Percival Piff grinned. Matilda would come down too late to catch him!

When Mr. Piff emerged from the corner again he was serene in the knowledge that he was safe, that he had returned to the present. On going upstairs, seeing the disarranged furniture, and taking a quick glance at the desk calendar, he was positive.

Mr. Piff went into the kitchen and sat down to resume his perusal of next week's news. And as he paged through the various sections of the paper, he was struck by the enormous possibilities of the thing.

Why, it was incredible! He could even find out in advance how his favorite comic strip was faring!

Eagerly, therefore, he turned to "*Orphan Agnes*", the adventures of this young lady having long provided sheer

joy in his uneventful existence. His hands shook a little as he held the paper, for only yesterday Orphan Agnes had been left tied to a buzz-saw in a deserted mill by a one-eyed Chinaman. The comics of the week ahead would certainly show whether or not she had been saved.

She was. Mr. Piff sighed. Orphan Agnes was safe and sound, and in the middle of another adventure.

"That's good," he said gratefully. "I was left pretty darned worried yesterday."

The next moment Mr. Piff heard a thumping noise on the back steps. The paper had just been delivered for the morning. The paper of the present. Old stuff. Mr. Piff didn't bother to glance up. He concentrated instead on his exclusive future edition.

He paged rapidly through the financial sections, for they had always bored him. He had never been able to understand about stocks and bonds and margin. Too complicated.

After avidly reading the remaining comic strips, Mr. Piff turned to the sporting section of the paper. There was nothing much there. Just a summary of the "past week's racing results. He would have passed the summary by, but he thought suddenly of the fellow employees in his office who played the races every day. He tore the summary out; for, although he didn't follow the ponies himself, the others might appreciate it to have the winners in advance.

"They might like it," Mr. Piff muttered vaguely, and stuffed the torn section into his pocket. Then he scanned the news section hurriedly, for he heard sounds of Matilda stirring upstairs. He didn't want her to wake up and catch him down in the kitchen.

His eyes widened at a column of type he saw.

"My goodness," Mr. Piff said in hor-

ror, "Just look at this!" Then, lips moving, he read the account silently. "District Attorney Murdered In Street!" he gasped. "Why, that's awful, mowed down by machine guns in a racing automobile!"

Sounds of Matilda stirring about in the bedroom upstairs became increasingly louder. He rose. Matilda would catch him down here if he didn't hurry. Folding the paper under his arm, Mr. Piff padded down to the basement, where he threw it into the blazing furnace and watched it burn.

"She won't be able to get her hands on it now," he said to himself.

He sighed then, and retraced his steps to the living room. Stretching out on the couch, he closed his eyes for an hour's nap before going to work. But before he dropped off to sleep, he told himself,

"Matilda mustn't know about this. I don't think she'd approve."

This was exciting. The only exciting thing that had ever entered the drab existence of Percival Piff. He smiled and closed his eyes, and in another few minutes was dozing peacefully.

CHAPTER III

Mr. Piff Predicts

FOR the next several days Percival Piff lived in an incredibly rosy world. Each day, as he went to work, his head swam with assorted information gathered on his nightly trips to the future. Of course, he had finally had to decide that he couldn't tell a soul about the discovery of the Futurescope. For it would only make trouble, and no one would believe him. Least of all Matilda.

However, he was able to find some occasional outlets for the power he possessed. There was, for example, the matter of horse playing. Mr. Piff had

decided against giving his racing summary to his fellow office employees. He couldn't tell them what horses would win and expect them to believe him, without revealing his source of information. And he could hardly do that. They'd think him loony.

So Mr. Piff compromised with the situation. He played the races himself, wagering a daily quarter on a sure thing selected from the summary he'd torn from the newspaper. It gave him a feeling of bravado to play the spendthrift, the devil-may-care plunger before the rest of the office staff.

Twenty-five cents a day. On a horse. Just like that. That was Percival Piff for you. Reckless!

But, of course, he couldn't lose. And once or twice he had a twinge of guilt about it. He knew it really wasn't fair to the gentlemen who took bets down at the cigar store. But he smoothed his conscience by telling himself that they probably could afford to lose now and then. It made him feel better when he convinced himself that they could afford to sustain their losses. After all, he didn't want to break them.

And in the meantime Mr. Piff found another outlet for his power. He arrived at it quite by chance, during the half-hour lunch siesta awarded the employees of Hammer, Hammer and Tongs, for whom Mr. Piff had labored in diligent obscurity these twenty years. During this half hour for lunch, it was the habit of the workers not going out to eat to sit around the office, gossiping and conversing generally while they consumed the fare they brought with them in little paper bags.

Mr. Piff was one of the paper-bag brigade, but he had never been a party to much of the noontime gossip. Somehow he never figured prominently when viewpoints were being aired. But during this particular lunch period—it was

on the third morning following his discovery of the Futurescope—he pricked up his ears and listened attentively to the comment, while thoughtfully munching his lettuce sandwich.

"This city is too damned full of crime," bellowed a Mr. Boodle, from the shipping room.

The conversation had been centering around politics, and Mr. Boodle had worked his fat face into an angry crimson over the topic.

"Too full of crime," Boodle repeated, thumping his ham-like fist down on Mr. Piff's desk to emphasize the point. "And the D. A. don't do nothing about it! Nothing at all. He's as big a crook as the rest!"

Mr. Piff, who had never particularly liked Mr. Boodle, saw his chance and stepped into the argument.

"The District Attorney is doing all he can to stop crime," he observed in a loud, though squeaky voice.

Every eye in the office turned to Mr. Piff. An utterance from him had been about as unexpected as gondolas would be on the Gobi Desert. There was a tense, surprised silence while they waited for him to continue.

Mr. Piff felt a funny feeling of excitement playing up and down his spine as he phrased his next sentence.

"As a matter of fact," he declared, "the District Attorney has grown so unpopular with certain of the—er—underworld element, that they intend to kill him next week!"

THE silence held for an instant longer, then exploded. Exploded into laughter in his face. This, from Mr. Piff, had apparently been just about the funniest thing they'd heard in ages.

"In on the know?" Boodle chortled sarcastically.

Mr. Piff, ears crimson, opened his

mouth for an indignant protest. Didn't those fools realize he knew? But no. Of course not. They didn't know, and wouldn't believe him even if he told them everything.

Additional uncomplimentary remarks were made, and quite suddenly Mr. Piff found himself standing up to face his hecklers.

"You mark my words," he shouted squeakily before he could stop himself. "You mark my words. That is my prediction!"

Then, aghast at the emotion that had been strong enough to make him lose his temper, Mr. Piff slumped back into his seat.

"Oh my," he thought. "Now I've done it. They'll think I'm an awful fool. I'll never live this down!"

But suddenly he remembered. It *would* come true. Of course it would come true. And he would be vindicated. Why, he'd been silly to worry. Everything would be all right. The tiny inner voices said,

"Courage, Piff. You know what's what."

So Mr. Piff turned on the office staff again.

"You wait and see," he repeated. "It's my prediction!"

The lunch period ended on this note. But Mr. Piff, returning to sort his invoices, felt grimly triumphant. He'd show them! Smart alecks, that's what they were. But they'd find out that P. Piff was no fool. No, sir!

In less than a week his prediction would come true, and then they would begin to show a proper respect for him. Why, just that one prediction alone would be enough to establish him as a person of some importance around the office!

So when Mr. Piff rolled down his sleeves and left the office for home, late that afternoon, he walked on fleecy

white columns of clouds. In his mind he had already half planned a gigantic campaign to gain the self-respect of his fellow workers. It would be easy. All he'd need would be one prediction a day. And then, when they all started coming true— He smiled in happy anticipation.

"Every day," he told himself, "I'll make a forecast of some sort." He paused. "Let's see," he frowned, "the District Attorney will be shot on the tenth. That's four days from now. That will be the first of my forecasts to come true. Then, with one a day from then on, it shouldn't be long."

Percival Piff smiled again. Already he was able to see them treating him as an equal. The sensation was enormously pleasing. He had never been considered as anything but a worm before.

Deliberately then Mr. Piff went down to his Futurescope every evening and traveled a week into the future. But it was not haphazardly that he did so. He had a purpose, now.

On these trips to the future he gathered odd data and information concerning things that were due to happen, returning to the present with his newfound knowledge every morning—so that he could take it to work with him and show off before the office crowd.

This gave Mr. Piff great satisfaction. And further satisfaction lay in a little box in his office drawer. It was a sum amassed from almost a week of daily wagers on the horse races.

The breathtaking total of this wealth was—four dollars and eighty-five cents!

TO Percival Piff this was utterly magnificent. Four eighty-five! Better, even, than a raise in pay! He was in seventh heaven. It meant money that Matilda never need know about. Money he could actually spend on himself if he wished.

Mr. Piff was beginning to appreciate the power vested in him by the Future-scope. The thing had its advantages. Undoubtedly. And he, Percival Piff, wasn't missing a trick. No sir!

And finally Mr. Piff awoke to the morning on which his first forecast was to prove itself.

CHAPTER IV

Personal Troubles

ON his way down to work, Percival Piff felt somewhat similar to that historic gentleman, Napoleon, when said gentleman was riding a gilded coach to be crowned Emperor at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

For this, September 10th, was Mr. Piff's day.

He had made certain that the exact hour of the District Attorney's assassination would fall shortly after noon. Approximately twelve-fifteen. The afternoon editions of the papers, therefore, would carry the news, and the office staff would learn of his astounding vindication before the day was over.

Percival Piff beamed at his fellow passengers on the elevated, and almost gave in to a wild impulse to chuck the chubby chin of a runny-nosed urchin who sat beside him.

He felt very fine. Very fine indeed. And yet, somehow, he didn't feel quite as splendid as circumstances should warrant. There was something on his mind, something that gave him a vague feeling of uneasiness. But for the life of him, he couldn't fathom what it was. It was similar to a twinge of conscience. But for the life of him, again, he could think of no reason for these birth pangs of guilt.

So he smiled again and he felt almost—but not quite—perfect as he sauntered into the offices of Hammer, Ham-

mer and Tongs. He removed his coat and proceeded to dig into his stack of invoices when the vague feeling of uneasiness returned.

Mr. Piff frowned. Mr. Boodle, wearing a truculent sneer, passed his desk, and Mr. Piff wouldn't have noticed him, except that Boodle spoke.

"What's your prediction today, Master Mind?"

Mr. Piff looked up sharply. "Eh—uh —what did you say?"

Mr. Boodle repeated his question mockingly, and Mr. Piff, staring abstractly at Boodle's beefy midriff, answered absently, giving a bit of political news. Boodle left then, laughing loudly and repeating the forecast to the other workers in the office.

The laughter nettled Mr. Piff, and he looked at his watch. In another four hours they'd know he was no fool. In another four hours the District Attorney would be—

Mr. Piff sat bolt upright, clapping his hands to his brow. That was it! Of course, that was it!

"My gosh!" he gasped. "I've been a fool, an utter inconsiderate fool."

It had suddenly dawned on him what had been plucking so insistently at his conscience. *The District Attorney was going to die!* The D. A. was going to be murdered; and he, P. Piff, was the only one who knew about it, who could prevent it.

Percival Piff—with that failing common to all humans—had been so wrapped up in the vindication of his predictions that he had completely forgotten the the vindication involved *murder*.

He felt ashamed of himself. His duty, of course, was crystal clear.

Percival rose and looked again at his watch. There was still four hours left in which, as a righteous citizen, he could save the District Attorney. He crammed

his hat on his head, shrugged into his coat, and rushed for the door.

Exactly thirty minutes later, he arrived wild-eyed and breathless at the offices of the District Attorney.

AN enormous policeman was stationed before the doors of the D.A.'s suite, and this worthy was almost startled out of his half slumber by the little man who dashed up to him and seized him by the arm.

"The District Attorney," gasped Mr. Piff, "where is he?"

The officer of Law and Order shook Mr. Piff's paw from his arm.

"Shure now, peanut, what is it yez want to see him about?"

"A murder!" groaned Mr. Piff, a-tremble at the very thought.

The policeman looked visibly shaken. Obviously Mr. Piff did not look like the type associated with violence.

"What's that?" the delegate of Peace and Security fairly bellowed. "A murderer?"

Mr. Piff nodded, signifying that that was exactly what he meant. He opened his mouth to say more, but the corpulent cop had already wheeled and dashed inside the anteroom he had been guarding. Mr. Piff leaped to his heels, following him inside.

"There's a guy outside," the cop was gasping, "who sez there wuz a murder!"

He addressed another uniformed man, smaller and more intelligent looking, who seemed to be a Police Lieutenant. The Lieutenant spotted Mr. Piff.

"Is that the gentleman?" he asked, pointing at Percival Piff incredulously.

The big cop looked at Mr. Piff.

"Yahl!" he growled.

Obviously the huge Guardian of Righteousness was more familiar with doorman duty and the peddling of tickets to the Police Ball, than he was with murders. The situation seemed

to have gotten away from him. But the Lieutenant was quite calm.

"What's this all about?" he asked Percival Piff.

"The District Attorney," breathed Mr. Piff. "Is the District Attorney in?"

The Lieutenant was losing patience.

"You can tell me what's on your mind," he snapped.

Mr. Piff gazed at him dubiously, then lowered his voice to a stage whisper.

"Someone," he hissed, "is going to murder the District Attorney, at twelve-fifteen." He raised his voice once more. "I thought he'd like to know about it."

The expression on the Lieutenant's face changed subtly. He was used to this sort of thing. Why was it, he wondered, that cranks were always such mousey little people. Gazing at Mr. Piff, he felt sure that this was the mousiest little crank he had ever run up against.

"Well," he said dryly. "I'm glad you let us in on that little item. You've no idea how much it will help."

Mr. Piff straightened his frail shoulders proudly.

"Thank you, Lieutenant," he said. "I thought it would."

The Lieutenant sighed under his breath and walked over to a drawer, where he took out some paper forms. If he got this little crackpot to fill out a complaint blank, the said crackpot should be satisfied. It usually made all the screwballs feel important.

"Here," said the Lieutenant, "fill in one of these. Give your name, address, place of business, et cetera. Then, just so we won't forget who to thank, you might put down the data about the District Attorney's murder."

With the dignity of a man receiving a decoration for conspicuous valor, Mr. Piff walked over to a desk and sat down. Then he carefully filled out the

form, blotted it, and handed it to the Lieutenant.

"Then everything will be taken care of?" he asked in a voice of immense relief.

"Yes, surely—" the Lieutenant looked down at the form—"Mr. Piff. Everything will be taken care of. Thank you very much."

He extended his hand, and Percival Piff shook it solemnly. Then he turned and made his exit, a citizen who had done his duty. The sense of foreboding that had been hanging over him had now vanished. He was quite relieved, and left the building whistling.

When noon arrived, and the office gossips gathered again, Mr. Piff munched his lunch and held his silence. There would be no vindication today. Time enough for that with another prediction tomorrow. He felt a glow of pride in the fact that he had so nobly sacrificed his vanity to duty. Besides, what was one prediction, more or less, in the life of a man who could foretell anything!

BOODLE was making derogatory remarks and Mr. Piff was ignoring them, when a commotion broke out in the hall outside the office. The lunchers all turned to face the door, and in the next instant four uniformed policemen, led by a man in a Lieutenant's chevrons, burst into the room!

One of the office stenogs screamed. Boodle let out a hoarse gasp. But Percival Piff, of them all, remained cool. He rose, smiling, for he recognized the man at the front of the van as the Lieutenant he had left several hours ago. He had a hunch, too, as to their reasons for coming here. They were probably going to commend P. Piff personally for what he had done that morning. And with the entire office staff looking on! Mr. Piff swelled with pride.

Mr. Piff waved a cheery greeting to the Lieutenant, who was advancing across the room. Waved a cheery greeting and said with very becoming modesty,

"Well, Lieutenant, I must say that this is quite unexpected."

Stanley, when he found Dr. Livingstone, couldn't have packed more drama into his historic line than Percival Piff put into that sentence.

Mr. Piff moved to meet the Police, feeling the eyes of the entire office upon him. Nonchalantly he extended his hand to the Lieutenant. The Lieutenant grabbed it, and in the next instant Mr. Piff was flying over his head. Swift jiujitsu!

Mr. Piff didn't get the drift of things very well, but it was clear, when four patrolmen hurled themselves upon his prostrate body, that no decoration or commendation was intended.

He heard the Lieutenant's voice, harsh and realistic, clearing up the situation for him.

"Piff," the Lieutenant snarled, "I arrest you for the murder of the District Attorney!"

CHAPTER V

Black Despair

UNDER different circumstances, Mr. Piff might have found his ride in the screaming, siren-ed squad car somewhat exhilarating, perhaps even thrilling. But under the present circumstances he was utterly terrified. He crouched in the rear of the car, guarded by five policemen, with his eyes shut tight in an effort to hide, ostrich fashion, from his woe.

Twenty minutes later he was bundled limp and unprotesting into the gloomy quarters of the "sweat room" at the Detective Bureau. There he was hand-

cuffed to a chair, while a thousand and one cops, plainclothes detectives and uniformed harness bulls harassed and tormented him.

Lights were blazing mercilessly into his eyes, and while he writhed there unable to escape, he was grilled for three hours. To Percival Piff, during this session of terror, the rasping voice of his spouse, Matilda, would have sounded like the singing of a lark.

The questions hurled at him by his inquisitors were as varied as they were stupid.

"Tell us how yuh done it," one questioner would rasp.

"Yeah, tell us the names of the boys yuh got to do the actual doity woik," another would follow.

"Come on, Piff, come clean! Sign this confession, or it'll be a lot worse for you later on," a third would shout.

And through it all, the blaze of lights, confusion and sweaty faces glaring at him, Percival Piff was able to make only one reply.

"Please," he repeated endlessly. "I didn't do it. I don't know who did it!"

For Mr. Piff knew that he could never, under any circumstances, tell them that he had picked up his advance knowledge of the crime from a newspaper account that hadn't then been written—in a paper that hadn't at that time been published. It would have been too preposterous an explanation, and would have served only to further increase the wrath of his tormentors. He had enough grief pressing down on his miserably bent little shoulders as it was.

Finally, utterly spent, Percival Piff was taken to the County Jail, where he was locked up for the night. This was at five o'clock, and he lay exhausted on the hard gray cot in his tiny cell until the turnkey came with his supper an hour later.

The rattling of keys in the lock of

his cell door made Mr. Piff sit up on his cot.

The turnkey was short, fat, good-natured and bald. Mr. Piff perceived all this in a glance.

"Well, well," said the turnkey, in the jovial tones of a mortician during a boom season, "well, well! You don't look like no killer to me."

"Thank you," said Mr. Piff, taking a tin plate of beans from his hand. "I am glad to hear somebody say so."

The turnkey scratched his bald head.

"But yuh never kin tell, I allus say. I seen a lotta killers in my day. The brainy type allus looks like innercent peepul."

Mr. Piff, disdaining to reply to this change of sentiment, took a steaming tin cup of coffee from the fellow.

"Come, come," said the turnkey. "Don't take it so hard. It ain't as bad as it seems. Before yuh know it, they'll have fried yuh, and it won't make a bit of difference then."

PERCIVAL PIFF was not blessed with a strong constitution, and the last remark made him put down his plate of beans hurriedly. He let his head rest in his hands, and remained in that position, shaking like a man with a chill.

"What's wrong?" The turnkey seemed perplexed. "Did I say somethin' to offend yuh?"

"Go away," Mr. Piff managed to groan. "Go away and leave me alone."

With the air of a fine host whose hospitality has been spurned, the turnkey rose.

"Okay, okay," he muttered. "Have it your own way. I was jest trying to be neighbor-like with yuh. If yuh feel any better in the morning, we can have us a little chat. See yuh then!"

Mr. Piff barely heard the clang of the steel door closing behind the turnkey.

He was beyond such minor sensations as hearing and seeing, for his soul was drenched in a torrent of anguish. He was utterly wrapped in his grief.

"Oh my," he groaned softly, "oh my, what will I ever be able to do?"

Subconsciously, as the cheery turnkey made his exit, Mr. Piff's eyes had caught a sheet of white paper sticking out of that gentleman's rear pocket. Subconsciously, his mind had registered and identified the paper. It was a daily racing sheet.

The realization made Mr. Piff groan again. For it had served to bring a fresh surge of remorse sweeping down on him. It had reminded him again of the future into which he had trespassed, the future which had somehow done him dirt.

For Percival Piff, the long night brought no rest. While hour after hour crawled slowly past, he paced back and forth in the narrow confinements of his tiny cell. The realization of his plight grew stronger and stronger upon him, until at last he was certain that he couldn't stand it any longer. He longed for the soothing sound of Matilda's nagging voice, the pleasant obscurity of his unimportant niche in the offices of Hammer, Hammer and Tongs.

Remorse and nostalgia, blending in a subtle pattern, were weaving a cloak of utter despair around Mr. Piff. And there was one sentence which, if repeated once, was repeated a hundred times by the miserable little man in the darkened cell.

It was simply, "I wish I'd never seen the future!"

Morning was long in coming. But being an eventuality, it finally arrived in the form of a bleak gray dawn that seeped in through the bars of Mr. Piff's cell.

Red-eyed and haggard, he stood dejectedly against the bars of his coop, lis-

tening to the sounds of other prisoners waking. Then at last he heard the banging of tin cups and plates, and the odor of coffee wafted subtly to his nostrils. Breakfast was being served.

Breakfast — The thought almost broke him down completely. At that very moment, he could have been rising to coffee, bacon and eggs in his own humble little house. If only he hadn't meddled into the future.

"If," said Mr. Piff bitterly, "if!"

And then the turnkey, the same one who had brought his supper to him the night before, was before his cell. The fellow's face was split in a cherubic grin of greeting, and he carried a cup and a plate in one beefy paw, while the other hand sought for the proper key to unlock Mr. Piff's cell.

"Well," the turnkey began in his cheerful voice, "how is our best guest today?"

M R. PIFF looked at him dully and sighed.

"Fine," he said without enthusiasm, "just fine."

"They ain't gonna question yuh today," the turnkey said when he'd deposited the plate and cup on Mr. Piff's bunk. "Just thought you'd like to know."

Percival Piff felt a sudden surge of hope.

"Have they any leads on who committed the crime?"

"Naw," said the turnkey. "They know you engineered it. That's all they need."

Mr. Piff's hopes deflated like a pricked balloon. He resumed his seat on the cot.

"Oh my," he said, "oh my!"

Suddenly he felt no more resentment for the turnkey. For it occurred to him that the rotund little man was the only friend he had in the world. The only

one, at any rate, who had been decent to him since the start of his troubles. Mr. Piff turned to him.

"I'm sorry about the way I acted, turnkey," he said. "You've been trying to be decent and I didn't appreciate it."

The turnkey colored a modest red.

"Shucks," he said, "just tried to cheer *yuh* up, that's all. Forget it."

"No," said Mr. Piff, "I appreciate it, and I only wish there was something I could do for you."

"Skip it." The turnkey, blushing, rose to leave. "I have to get around to the other cells, but I'll see you at lunch."

He made his exit, and Mr. Piff heard his heels clacking down the stone corridor before he realized that he had once more noted subconsciously that a copy of the daily racing sheet protruded from the turnkey's hip pocket. With a sudden flash of inspiration, Mr. Piff leaped to his feet. He could repay the kindness of the turnkey. He could give him racing tips for the day!

The turnkey, however, had gone on to other cells. So Mr. Piff was forced to wait until that gentleman came with lunch at noon.

"Look," said Mr. Piff eagerly, when the turnkey brought him in his beans. "Look, I said I wanted to do something to repay your kindness, but I couldn't think of anything. Now I have, and it will help to repay your kindness to me."

The turnkey blushed. "That's all right. Forget it, pal."

"But you don't understand," Mr. Piff protested. "I want to do you a favor. You're the only person who has treated me like a human being, given me a break, since all my troubles began. It's the least I can do, and it will make me feel better inside."

"Okay," said the turnkey, "you win. What is it?"

"Tips," said Mr. Piff eagerly. "I

saw the racing sheet in your pocket. That means you play the horses. I can give you surefire tips. The winners of all the races."

The expectant smile slid slowly off the turnkey's face, and his expression became frigid.

"Oh," he said, "a wise guy, eh?"

"But you don't understand!" Mr. Piff fairly squealed. "I can give you the winning horses. I can give you every race in one-two-three order. I know what ones are going to win today!"

"I suppose," said the turnkey with heavy sarcasm, "that you can tell who's gonna win the Special Handicap in the fourth race at Fairmont."

"Certainly." Mr. Piff nodded in excitement.

"I oughta paste *yuh* one," growled the turnkey with sudden savagery. "I thought *yuh* was a nice little guy—in spite of the fact that *yuh* killed the D. A. But now it turns out that you're jest a tout!"

"No! No!" Mr. Piff was on his feet, pleading for belief. "I can give you the winners. Please believe me!" He paused, searching his memory. "At Fairmont, in the first race, the horses will be Skag, Toby and Come Quick, in that order. The second race will result in Soso, Dotell and By-me, running in that order. The third race will see Tomorrow, Again and Lash Ahead as the first, second and third horses respectively."

THE turnkey was at the cell door, glaring at Mr. Piff.

"Very likely," he snarled, "very likely, indeed. So long, tout!"

Percival Piff slumped down on his cot again, tears starting to his eyes. He had lost his only friend, the only one who was even close to being a friend. No one believed him. No one trusted

P. Piff. The tears ran unashamed down his cheeks. Mr. Piff was getting damned fed up with life. He had looked on it with trusting gaze, and it had given him a swift kick in the posterior quarters.

"I wish," he sobbed aloud, "that I could get out of here!"

Suddenly he took his head from his hands. *Get out*—Why, it was the first time that the thought of escape had occurred to him. He looked wildly about. Could he? Was there any means of breaking out?

But as he looked, his gaze encountered nothing but steel, steel and locks. It was apparently quite impossible.

"No," he began to sob once more. "No, I can't escape. I'm done for. There isn't a chance." He slumped once more on his cot, putting his hands to his face.

In that position, Mr. Piff remained for more than two hours, not moving, a picture of utter dejection, dismal despair. He was broken, beaten, waiting only for the final crushing blow to fall.

CHAPTER VI

The Worm Turns

HEY!" A voice broke in sharply on Mr. Piff's dulled consciousness. "Hey, Piff!"

He heard a key being hastily inserted in the door to his cell. He looked up to see the turnkey, face red with wild excitement, bursting into his penal crypt.

"Piff!" The turnkey had him by the shoulder, was shaking him. "Piff!"

"Well?" Mr. Piff looked wearily up at him.

"Look, Piff. Gee, I'm sorry! I had yuh wrong, pal. I had yuh wrong an' I'm sorry."

Mr. Piff found the strength to frown.

"What do you mean?"

"Them races, the ones yuh picked," the turnkey panted in breathless urgency. "They all come in like yuh said they would."

Mr. Piff became more alert.

"Did you play them?"

The expression on the turnkey's face was one of acute, dire and devastating remorse.

"No," he confessed hoarsely, "no, I didn't." He gulped twice. "Until it was too late, until the third race was over, I didn't realize that the ones you picked came in."

"That's too bad," said Mr. Piff disinterestedly.

"No, it ain't! I mean, yes, it is—but it ain't, really," the turnkey said quickly. "What I mean is—Well—uh —about that Special Handicap at Fairmont, the fourth race. It ain't started yet. It's due to start in five minutes. That's what I run like the devil from the cigar store down at the corner for. I wanted to ask yuh what the winning horse is gonna be."

"Starts in five minutes?" asked Mr. Piff, faintly concerned.

"Yeah, please! What's the name of that horse?" The turnkey was excited, and the turnkey was in a hurry. He was obviously desperate.

Percival Piff looked at him with mild reproach.

"But you didn't believe me, when I told you before."

"Look." The turnkey almost shouted. "I know I didn't. But I had yuh wrong. I had yuh wrong and I admit it. Now, what's the name of that horse?" He looked at his watch frantically. "Cripes, hurry! There's only four minutes left until post time!"

"Four minutes," said Mr. Piff, "is not very long." An odd expression of cunning crept into his lack-lustre eyes, a gleam of unwanted shrewdness.

"Three minutes," screamed the turnkey, "is all that's left! Look, Piff, fer Gawd's sake! I'm sorry I didn't believe you before. I got a wife and kids, I got a mortgage, and bills and bills and bills!" he wailed. "I *gotta* know the name of that nag. It'll make me a fortune!"

"I don't know," said Percival Piff sadistically, "if I should tell you."

"Loooooooook," screamed the turnkey, "it's only two minutes until post time! Holy catfish, I can jest make it. Pleeeeeeeeassse, Piff!"

Mr. Piff wet his lips, thinking of the fifty-fifty gamble he was counting on. It might work. Play it slow, and it might work. He sighed.

"Weeeeeeellll—" he began.

"Pleeeeeeeeasssse!" wailed the turnkey. "There's only a minute and a half until post time!"

Mr. Piff let time dangle a moment longer.

"The name," he said finally, "is—"

"Yes?" screamed the frenzied turnkey.

"Cat's Meow," said Mr. Piff. "Cat's Meow."

"Cat's Meow!" bellowed the turnkey. "And a minute left to get my bet down!"

WITH a hoarse gasp, he wheeled on his flat heels and went flying out the cell. A rocket shot from the 1940 model of Big Bertha couldn't have gained such explosive speed in such a short distance.

Mr. Piff smiled. His first smile in many hours. His scheme had worked as planned. The turnkey had been in far too much of a hurry to bother locking the cell door as he left!

Taking a deep breath, and forcing himself to be casual, Mr. Piff stepped calmly from the cell and sauntered down the corridor.

With the exception of several prisoners sleeping soundly in cells farther down the tier, the corridor was deserted. Mr. Piff forced himself to continue his casual saunter. He couldn't run; didn't dare, even though every instinct clamored for him to do so, to dash pell-mell from the place.

The opportunity for escape had presented itself so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that Mr. Piff hadn't had time to debate the issue, hadn't had time to grow frightened over the prospect. But now, as he neared the door leading out to the corridors of the County Building, he breathed a fervent, semi-hysterical prayer that the turnkey had also left that door unlocked.

It was open, and Mr. Piff stepped out into freedom with a deep grateful sigh. In another moment he had slipped quickly down the side hall in which he found himself, and into the main corridor and the ever-moving stream of people. Two minutes more, and he was out on the street.

Freedom!

It was wonderful. Mr. Piff breathed deeply. Even the carbon monoxide odors from passing buses and autos seemed splendid. Suddenly he stopped. The excitement that had been flooding nectar-like through his veins vanished. Vanished to be replaced by fear at a new thought.

"Where can I go?" he asked himself. "Oh my, where can I go?"

It came to Percival Piff at that moment that he had no sanctuary, no place of refuge; and, worse, no money to find one. He was free, yes. But only for the moment. In another five or ten minutes he would be a hunted criminal!

"My house," he thought desperately, "I can hide there."

And at that minute, while he was still less than a block from the County Building, he heard a whistle's screech.

And immediately on its heels there came another, from the County Jail quarters. An utterly terrifying siren started moaning shrilly!

They had discovered his escape already!

All around him people had halted, to turn and stare in excitement at the County Building. The siren was wailing with intensified fury now, and traffic too was halting.

"And they're looking for me!" Mr. Piff thought in terror. "For me!"

"Jail break!" someone near him shouted. "Jail break at the County Building!"

Percival Piff didn't pause to plan any particular scheme of flight. He set his thin shoulders and pushed recklessly through the crowds in the street. There was one thought in his horrified brain—to put all possible distance between himself and the County Building, between himself and the police, between himself and the electric chair.

In a word, Mr. Piff ran like hell.

Which, as it developed a moment later, was not a very bright thing to do.

"Look!" someone screamed, while the siren wailed again. "That little guy, running, must be the escaped prisoner!"

"Stop him, then!" another voice shouted. "Stop that murderer!"

MR. PIFF, his breath scorching his lungs, darted down an alleyway. He could hear footsteps behind him. Footsteps running, gathering speed, gathering volume. The chase was increasing.

"Stop, stop the escaped prisoner! He's a fiend! He killed his mother-in-law and three aunts!"

There was a doorway open off the alley, and without hesitation, Mr. Piff plunged into it. It was a dark dank passageway, but he stumbled onward

for perhaps fifty yards before he slowed down. The sound of the steps behind him was no longer audible. Staring down the far end of the passage, Mr. Piff saw that there was light waiting down there. He started out for it.

A roaring was coming from the end of that passage, where the lights were, and in several more seconds Mr. Piff paused at the entrance to a vast garage. The roaring was coming from a line of trucks less than fifty yards away from him.

At the front entrance to the garage, the doors were opened to permit the trucks to leave, and one of the vehicles was already trundling forward.

Mr. Piff set out swiftly after it, catching hold of the tailgate and swinging onto the rear platform. There were bundles on the rear platform, big white bundles, and Mr. Piff concealed himself behind them while the truck roared out of the garage and into the street.

His heart was hammering wildly against his puny ribs, but Mr. Piff was able to breathe a momentary sigh of relief.

"Gosh," he told himself, wiping the sweat from his long thin nose, "gosh, that was close!"

And just the thought of it forced him to close his eyes and give way to a minute of violent shudders.

From his position on the back of the bouncing vehicle, Mr. Piff peered owlishly out from behind the white bundles occasionally to mark the street intersections they passed. It was a matter of sheer luck that the truck was traveling in the direction of his home. Not directly toward there, of course, but in the general vicinity.

Finally, when the truck slowed for a stop sign in a quiet little residential section, Mr. Piff climbed off and took to the alleys. It was more than an hour later when he drew up within a few

blocks of his bungalow. Now he proceeded with much more caution than before.

"They might have men surrounding the house," he told himself. "They always do in detective stories."

It was still not quite clear to him why he desired to return home at all. Possibly he was acting with the instinct of a small boy running away, who must bid someone a dramatic farewell before doing so. Matilda would serve that purpose. She might even give him some money to carry him far away. He had vague ideas about the Foreign Legion, although he didn't know whether they'd been demobilized by the French now that Hitler had beaten them.

At the end of the block on which he lived, Mr. Piff paused and looked carefully up and down the street. But nothing seemed unusual. There were no men lurking suspiciously about on the lawn, so he moved on.

Choosing to enter by the rear entrance, Mr. Piff found himself on the back porch. The door, fortunately, was slightly ajar, and he pushed into his kitchen.

"Okay, boys, that's Piff!"

The shout turned Percival Piff's blood to ice water, and he wheeled in horror to see men pouring forth from the bushes around his yard. Coming forth and heading for the porch, revolvers drawn.

"Take it easy, men! He's probably armed! He's desperate!"

Percival Piff slammed the door of the kitchen shut and threw home the bolt. Then he turned and gazed wildly around his little kitchen like a cornered rabbit. There was no place he could hide, and though he tried to conceal himself beneath the sink, he had to give the idea up.

"Oh goodness," Mr. Piff wailed. "Goodness me!"

HE scuttled into the living room. The sound of heavy pounding on the front door told him that the place was surrounded.

"Matilda," Mr. Piff squealed, "Matilda!"

But a mocking echo was his only answer. Matilda wasn't home. The hammering on the doors, front and rear, was growing louder, more frightening. Mr. Piff heard a window in the kitchen smash and tinkle on the floor.

He started toward the stairs leading to the upper floor of the house, then stopped. No. That wouldn't do. There was no place to hide up there. The din of hammering came again to his ears, followed by the heavy thump of footsteps landing on the kitchen floor. They were in the house!

There was no other choice open to Mr. Piff, so he dashed to the door leading down to the cellar. He slammed it shut behind him, slid the bolt, and stood there in the darkness, trembling. His hand touched something next to the door. It was his flashlight. The flash he'd nailed there for use in the cellar. He seized it, and in a moment was descending the stairs, guided by the white beam.

The odor of chemicals was once more strong in his nostrils. But it wasn't until he'd taken his second breath of the nostalgic smell that his heart suddenly soared wildly with hope. The fear that had been stamped in his eyes vanished, to be replaced by a new courage, a new determination.

For suddenly, Percival Piff realized he had a fighting chance! He was down the remaining steps in an instant.

The police were pounding on the door of the cellar now. But Mr. Piff wasn't concerned. Instead, he stood beside the Futurescope, playing his flash up and down the front of it.

"Those dials," he said: "I wonder."

Mr. Piff's mind was working at whirlwind speed. Every second was of obvious importance. The time machine had previously been able to throw him a week into the future, then a week back into the present.

Mr. Piff didn't want to get into the future this time, however. What he was concerned with was the past. He knit his brows and bent over the gadgets on the dial board.

There! He had it!

A dial reading "Ahead . . . Back" fell under the white rays of his flash. That was it! The dial was not set at "Ahead." That meant that he could go into the future and return to the present as long as the dial was at that point. But if it were pushed back to read "Back," the reverse should be in order. It would send him into the past and return him to the present when he wished.

The door at the top of the landing was splintering under the pounding impact of chairs wielded by the policemen. Glancing up quickly, to see that they hadn't broken through yet, Mr. Piff returned his concentration to the machine.

"Yes," said Mr. Piff. "Obviously the dial reading 'Back' can send me into the past. And if I'd ever want to, I could return to the present. But I don't think I'll want to."

His hand shoved the dial to "Back." His other hand, still holding the flash, flicked the machine on. The faint humming began immediately. Mr. Piff listened intently. Another smashing blow almost tore the cellar door from its hinges.

Mr. Piff stepped up to the machine. The tingling was suddenly all around him, flooding his tissues with that old familiar feeling. Faintly, as if from a great distance, he could hear the hammering on the door, voices shouting.

The pounding died off, the shouting subsided. The tingling continued.

PERCIVAL PIFF stepped away from the machine. Into silence, cold and blessed silence!

He looked down at his feet. Packages were strewn all around him. The machine was still there. A lump came to his scrawny throat as a voice shrilled to his ears, splitting the silence like an ax.

"Percival Piff," the voice screamed, "are you ever going to come upstairs? It shouldn't take you all night to put those packages down there!" Obviously, the voice was Matilda's.

And Mr. Piff was certain, then, that he was right back where he started from — a week in the past. September 3rd.

He gulped, snapped off the machine. His flashlight swung in a wide arc, revealing something leaning against the wall. It was a small sledgehammer.

Mr. Piff walked over to it and removed the cobwebs. He picked up the sledge, looked at the machine.

"The future," he murmured reflectively. He was thinking in a philosophical vein. He knew, as any philosopher does, that the future is predestined merely because man knows nothing of its course, and rushes blindly toward it as a consequence. But should a man be aware of the future—then, obviously, he could alter its course.

Which was exactly what Mr. Piff intended to do with his own future. He was going to alter it in his own way. Beginning with Matilda. And ending up with Hammer, Hammer and Tongs. They'd respect him after this. They'd have to. They'd give him a raise, too. A big one. Otherwise he would go across the street to Rowbottom, Rowbottom and Bilge with twenty years of business secrets in his brain.

(Concluded on page 123)

MURDER IN THE PAST

by JOHN
YORK CABOT

"In 1940 you will betray me—steal my wife. That is why I have come to 1920 to kill you; prevention is better than vengeance!"

FAYDON worked beneath the glaring light of a single lamp bulb hanging from a frayed cord above the laboratory desk. His thin shoulders, hunched over formulæ, charts, and figures before him, squirmed uncomfortably now and then, as his young, hungry-lean features tightened in rigid concentration.

He ran a chemical-stained hand through his lank black hair, pushed back the charts and papers, and straightened up.

"That's enough for a while," Faydon muttered, and the silence threw back faint echoes from the reaches of the dingy little laboratory.

Faydon looked at his watch. It was two a.m. His tired gray eyes looked discouragedly around the laboratory, and he shut them suddenly, as if to drive away the sight of his bleak surroundings. He opened them again, sighing heavily, and reached for a package at the far corner of his desk. A package wrapped in a newspaper, and tied with string.

He held the package in his hand momentarily, as if weighing it. Then his thin shoulders shrugged listlessly. If it weren't for the fact that he was so damned hungry— Smiling bitterly, Faydon began to untie the grocery cord that was wrapped around it. He knew

what was inside; a few scraps of meat between week-old slices of bread, some fruit that was overripe and unfit for consumption at fraternity tables. An early morning snack. One of the two "meals" he could afford daily.

Faydon laughed unpleasantly. "Everything but finger bowls," he told the silence of the dusty little laboratory.

There were four sandwiches inside, and Faydon knew that he would have to share two of these with his roommate. At the thought of his roommate, Paul Starman, Faydon looked up sharply toward the door. Starman should be due any moment. His job tending boilers didn't permit him to get to the laboratory until around two. But he was usually pretty prompt.

With enthusiasm produced only by the unpleasant hunger in his stomach, Faydon bit into a sandwich. Work, he thought, munching on the stale crusts, work and nothing but work. Ceaseless, thankless toil. Hours spent in a damned dump of a laboratory. Striving, learning, working side by side with Starman. Working toward a dream.

"Sometimes," Faydon said softly, "I'd be willing to chuck it all for a square meal."

He turned his attention to the newspaper in which the food had been wrapped. Three cents was a hell of a



"I've come to kill you, Faydon. I've come from 1940 to 1920 to prevent your treachery!"

lot to pay for a newspaper, so Faydon was used to reading day-old items. The rumpled journal at which he gazed while munching his sandwich was a day old. Its date line read, "Wednesday, March 22nd, 1920."

Faydon read and munched and wondered when his roommate would arrive. He and Starman had at least four hours work to do. Four hours in which to work out the third step in their experiment.

Footsteps rang down the corridor just outside the laboratory, and Faydon turned toward the door. This should be Starman now.

Faydon heard someone turning the handle of the door. Then it swung open.

"What held you up?" Faydon began, then stopped. The intruder was not his roommate. Not Starman. Instead, a fat, bald man, of middle stature and middle age, stood there in the doorway. His clothes were extremely and expensively cut—and he carried an automatic pistol in his hand.

FAYDON slid down from his stool, placing his half-eaten sandwich on the edge of the laboratory desk. For a moment he stood there wordlessly, gazing in astonishment at the intruder, at the pistol pointing toward him.

"What do you want?" Faydon managed to say at last. "Who are you, and what do you mean breaking into this laboratory like this?"

The fat, bald, expensively tailored man was standing just outside the full illumination of the bulb. His features were not quite clearly discernible. He moved forward a step, still holding the automatic pointed at Faydon.

"Don't you recognize me, Faydon?" he asked softly.

Faydon frowned. There was something in the voice, something to the way

the fellow stood, that jarred a chord in his memory. He had seen him somewhere before. He'd be almost willing to bet on it.

"Possibly I do, perhaps I don't," Faydon replied, eyes fixed on the intruder's automatic. "But what I want to know is what you think you're doing in here. And why you've that gun in your hand."

The bald man smiled, and Faydon again experienced a flash of recollection. "I'm going to use this pistol on you, Faydon. And that answers your question about my being here. I've come here to kill you. And I've come a long way."

Instinctively Faydon stepped back. Stepped back and paled. Obviously, this fellow was a madman. There wasn't a person in the world who would have any reason to want to kill him.

"Look," Faydon rasped hoarsely. "I don't know who you are. You seem slightly familiar. But if I've seen you before I can't remember where it was. No one has any reason to kill me. Put down that gun." His voice was shaking slightly as he finished, but he forced himself to remain cool. He tried to keep from looking at the door. Starman would be coming in a few minutes. And when the madman's attention was distracted —

The fat intruder must have seen Faydon's eyes shift toward the door, for he smiled again, unpleasantly. "Are you expecting someone, Faydon? Your fellow-student and roommate?"

He laughed quietly at the startled fear in Faydon's gaze. "Are you expecting a fellow named Starman?" he taunted.

"You know my roommate?"

"I should," the intruder replied laconically.

Sweat trickled down Faydon's forehead, and he tried to keep his hands from shaking. Tried to keep from

showing fear before this madman. The fellow knew Starman. Desperately, Faydon tried to recall where he'd seen him before. Not with Starman, certainly.

The gun was still pointed unwaveringly on Faydon. The fat, bald man behind it said: "Think, Faydon. You've plenty of time before I kill you. Try to think of where you've seen me before."

"I don't know," Faydon said huskily. "I tell you I've never seen you as far as I can remember. For God's sake put that gun down!"

The fat fellow laughed again. "Bleat all you want, Faydon. No one will hear you. This building is totally deserted at this time of night. I know that very well, you see."

Faydon realized the truth of the stranger's statement. Realized, too, that the stranger must have somehow acquainted himself with the tiny college campus, that the stranger must have found out that Starman would not arrive tonight. *Perhaps he had killed Starman.*

"Yes," the stranger continued, his bald head gleaming as he moved forward another step. "I know a lot about you, Faydon. Even if you don't seem to remember me. I know that the sandwiches you have in that package are made with week-old bread. I know that the fruit on the table there is almost rancid. You intended to save two sandwiches for Starman, didn't you? Sort of a usual custom, eh, while you two eager students burn the midnight oil?"

Faydon said nothing, but his startled gasp sounded loud in the laboratory.

"Eat Starman's sandwiches, Faydon, if you want them. He won't be wanting them tonight," the bald man behind the gun mocked him.

"WHO are you?" Faydon managed to blurt again. "For God's sake,

who are you and where did you come from?"

"Think, Faydon," the fat, bald fellow taunted him. "You saw me about eight hours ago. Surely you haven't forgotten me so soon?" He grinned mirthlessly, relishing the other's discomfort.

Faydon buried his face in his hands. "Damn you!" he sobbed chokingly. "Put down that gun!"

"You're overwrought, Faydon. Nerves," said the fat intruder. "You've been working too hard and too long. Three hours sleep a night isn't enough for anyone, even an ambitious science student. Your nerves are shot clean through, Faydon. Just like Starman's nerves are shot."

Faydon stood there beside the laboratory desk, shaking.

"You haven't got ambition, Faydon," the fat, bald man declared. "The thing you're confusing with ambition is greed. You're greedy for power and wealth and acclaim! I know you are, Faydon. I found out you are. Too late—almost. That's why I'm going to kill you."

Faydon was still trembling slightly, but he had managed to pull himself together a bit. He forced himself to look again at the fat, bald man, at the gun he held in his hand. He wondered if he could risk a dive for that gun. If the madman would just relax an instant.... But the gun still pointed unwaveringly.

"Yes," the fat fellow resumed, "I found you out before it was too late. Before your greed got the best of me. Before you took my wife!"

Faydon could only gape.

The fat, bald intruder smiled bitterly. "You think I'm talking in riddles, eh, Faydon? You don't know who my wife is? You never fool around with women, especially married ones, eh? You haven't got the time or the money for anything like that, now."

"You're mad," Faydon rasped.
"Stark, raving mad!"

The bald man nodded. "So it must seem to you, Faydon. Right now you're utterly innocent of the crimes of which I accuse you. Absolutely. I agree with you. But I'm going to kill you to *prevent* your damned desire for my wife, to *prevent* you from trying to take her from me!"

Faydon said nothing, his eyes flicking despairingly toward the laboratory door. Was Starman never coming? Was the madman right? Did he know something that gave him assurance that no one would interrupt them?

"There are other reasons," the stranger continued, "for my wanting to kill you, Faydon. I'm going to kill you to *prevent* your greed getting the best of me, to prevent you from doing me out of my money and reputation. I'm going to *prevent* your becoming a treacherous partner of mine."

THE fat, bald man moved closer beneath the solitary laboratory lamp bulb, and Faydon had the first distinct view of his features.

"Do you recognize me now, Faydon?" he demanded.

Faydon blinked unbelievingly. "No!" he gasped. "No!" His voice choked. "You can't be!"

That fat, bald man laughed again. "I'm older, Faydon. Older and fatter, and bald. The clothes I'm wearing aren't seedy, and they're designed a bit differently. Twenty years make a difference in a man, don't they?"

"No!" Faydon's voice was a gurgling sob. "You aren't Starman, you can't be Starman!"

"I can't be?" the other taunted. "I can't be?" Well, I am. And that's what counts, Faydon. That's what counts. I am Paul Starman. I am Paul Starman, bald, fat, and twenty years older.

But I am Paul Starman, your room-mate, your partner!"

The fat, bald man still kept his gun leveled at Faydon's chest, as he continued. "I'll explain it to you, Faydon, before I kill you. You'll appreciate the irony of it. You were always one for irony." He paused, then abruptly: "What year is this?"

Faydon heard himself answering automatically, unable to understand why he did so. "It's 1920."

"Exactly," said the fat, bald man. "Now, if you'll keep that in mind, I'll recite a little personal history for you. I'll begin that history by asking you a question. What are those charts and papers on the laboratory desk?"

Faydon hesitated. The fat, bald man waved his gun menacingly. "They're papers concerning a time theory," Faydon answered in terror.

"Ah, yes, I remember," the fat, bald intruder seemed ruminating, "a time theory. You and your fellow student, Paul Starman, are working on a time theory of your own, aren't you?"

Faydon felt himself nodding mechanically.

The bald man continued, "I'll pretend I'm not Starman, for our purposes.

"Starman and yourself have certain theories about time. The two of you hope some day to construct a machine. A machine that can transplant persons from one time phase to another. You believe that time is a sort of staircase; that all eras of time continue to exist, but that people merely pass through these eras. Right?"

Faydon looked at the bald man wordlessly. His brain was numbed by the words and event of the past minutes. This man was mad. This man must surely be mad. He looked like Starman. Like Paul Starman *might* look, twenty years hence, but he couldn't be Starman. Even though he babbled on

about a theory known only to Starman and himself!

"Do you believe that time theory?" the bald man demanded, once more waving his gun slightly.

Faydon gulped. "Yes," he said faintly. "It's true. Starman and I will prove—"

THÉ fat, bald man cut him off short. "That's all I want to know. If you believe that time is a staircase, that all time continues to exist, then you'll grant the possibility of someone from the future coming into this room right now—were that someone able to do so!"

Faydon decided that his only course was to humor this madman. This madman who looked so much like his roommate. He nodded. "It would be quite possible. If there were a means whereby it might be done."

The fat, bald fellow grinned mirthlessly. "I have done just that, Faydon. I have entered this room from the future. Twenty years in the future. That is why you see me, Paul Starman, as a man who has grown fat and bald. I'm Paul Starman. But the Starman of twenty years from now. The Starman of 1940, rather than 1920!"

A sickening sensation hit Faydon in the pit of the stomach. A sensation of incredulity, horror, doubt, and a gnawing conviction that this man might not be mad. That this man *might* possibly be Starman. Starman of the future, come back to the present!

Faydon believed in his time theory. Implicitly. Good God, hadn't he starved and slaved in its behalf? But this fat, bald man. This man who called himself Starman, who looked like Starman, whose voice sounded similar to Starman's— Faydon paled, his eyes really seeing for the first time the difference in design between his own clothing and the fat man's.

"Your idea is changing somewhat, eh?" said the man who *might* be Starman. "You are beginning to wonder if this can be. Well let me erase any further doubt, Faydon. Let me erase further doubt by telling you why I am here to kill you."

Faydon's face was white. He felt his reasoning becoming fogged, confused. Was this fat fellow right? The time theory. It could be. If—

"You and I—rather, I should say you and *Starman*—are working on a device at present, a formula, which you hope will enable you to construct a machine to carry men back and forth through time," the intruder continued. "You hope to see that dream completed in your lifetimes. It might take ten years, it might take twenty. It *did* take twenty years. For it is just that machine which I used to *return* twenty years to this dingy little laboratory. To return twenty years and kill you."

Faydon leaned weakly against the laboratory desk.

"The dream *was* completed. By "was" I mean it was completed in my time era. In 1940. The two of us completed the machine. But by then our circumstances changed, Faydon. By 1940 we were both successful in the world of science. Partners, Faydon. We stuck together twenty years, to accomplish many things which brought us wealth and fame, and finally saw the completion of our dream—the time machine conceived here in this laboratory, in this time era."

FAYDON felt as though his legs would no longer support him. He slumped down in the stool beside his desk. The fat, bald man, the man who might be Starman, smiled.

"Don't let my history confuse you, Faydon. Think of it in terms of what *can* happen according to your time

theory. I'm here in the year 1920, telling you what happened in the lapse of time between 1920 and 1940, because I *came from* 1940. Simple, Faydon, really simple.

"I'm telling you all this because of your sense of irony, remember, Faydon? I thought you'd like a little time mathematics before you die." He paused. "But to continue: By 1930 we were both renowned as partners in scientific discoveries. I got married then, Faydon, to a girl you don't know now. I never suspected that you wanted her. I was stupid. I didn't realize that you envied me, that you wanted more than your just share of wealth and fame, that you coveted my wife."

The fat, bald man moved closer, automatic still fixed unwaveringly on Faydon.

"This puzzles you, Faydon, because you know nothing of it. You'll never know anything of it. You won't have the chance to," the fat man declared. "That's why I've come to kill you—to prevent what has happened from happening." Again he smiled mirthlessly. "Involved?"

Faydon was gathering himself for a leap toward the gun in the fat, bald man's hand, and the man who *might* be Starman sensed it. He brought the nose of the automatic up toward Faydon's temple.

"Don't try anything, Faydon. I don't want to have to kill you until I've made it all straight." Faydon relaxed once more, and the fat man nodded. "That's better. Now to get back to where I was before you interrupted me."

The bald, fat man stopped abruptly. His eyes narrowed and he moved a step closer to Faydon. "What's wrong? Why are you staring at me like that, Faydon? Think I'm mad, eh?"

Faydon was watching him in horrified fascination, but said nothing, swallow-

ing hard.

The fat man waved the automatic. "No matter what you think. I've come back, Faydon. Back through time. Twenty years through time—to see to it that the memory of you is erased from time. It's a clever plan, Faydon. Don't you agree with me?" The fat, bald man laughed wildly. "Clever as hell. You want my wife; you plot to take my money and reputation from me. So I go back twenty years. Twenty years to the time when we were both starting out. I'll kill you in the year 1920, then return to my own era, 1940. The perfect crime, Faydon!"

SOMEHOW, Faydon found words.

"If what you say is true. If you *are* Starman, if you *have* returned from twenty years in the future, then your scheme will never work."

The fat man laughed harshly. "It's perfect, Faydon, and ironic. Here I'm bumping you off before you've even any knowledge of the crimes I hold against you. Before you're even guilty of them. It's funny, Faydon. Funny as hell!"

"You can shoot me if you wish," Faydon gulped. "You can kill me. But you'll never get back to 1940. You'll never return to your time era!"

The fat, bald man sneered. "You know nothing of the machine which we perfected. It permits man to travel through time in either direction. I've come back to 1920, and when I've killed you I can return to 1940. It's ironic, Faydon." He broke off in wild laughter.

"You forget," Faydon said hoarsely, "that you're subject to definite laws of time. You can't avoid those. You'll never return."

"Laws of time," the fat intruder scoffed, "have all been bridged. I'll return, never fear, Faydon. After I've killed you I'll return to my own time element. The time machine is right out-

side this door."

"You don't know it," Faydon said huskily, "but the laws of time, the laws you think you've bridged, are working on you at this very moment. You're changing physically, Starman. You're getting younger with every second. Your hair is returning, and you're losing weight. The pouches beneath your eyes are disappearing."

"A clever hoax, Faydon, but I don't believe you. You sha'n't sway me from my purpose. I'm going to kill you. Kill you and escape to my own time flight, to 1940, twenty years ahead of now." In spite of his words, Starman's hand went instinctively to his head.

"You might be the Starman of 1940," Faydon was saying rapidly, "but 1940 or 1920, I still know more about time theories than you do. I tell you you're changing. That you won't get back! Not in a time-machine."

"Like hell I won't!" Starman snarled, and his finger tightened convulsively on the trigger of the gun he held in his hand, squeezing again and again, the shots blasting the silence of the little laboratory. "Like hell I won't!"

Faydon, with the first shots, had jerked upward, arms flailing out to the side. Now he was pitching with sickening slowness to the floor, his hands clutching his stomach, his lips forming words.

"You fool," he gasped painfully, then he sprawled face forward and his breathing suddenly ceased.

A fog blanketed Starman's mind, and he felt an electric tingling throughout his body. Sickening blackness enveloped his brain and body, blotting out every last trace of the twenty years that had gone before him, the twenty minutes that had just passed.*

"Faydon!" he muttered thickly. "Good God, I've killed you!"

Footsteps clattered along the halls of the building. Footsteps running to investigate the sounds of the shots. But the man with the gun in his hand—a young man now, young and in the patched clothing of an impoverished student—scarcely heard them. He stared in horrified fascination at the gun in his hand, at the body on the floor.

People burst into the room. Voices rang in Starman's ears. Young Starman, no longer fat, no longer bald. Starman who had undergone the inevitable transition of time laws. Hands seized him, held him, but he didn't struggle. He couldn't tear his gaze from the body lying twisted and inert on the laboratory floor.

Bewilderedly, he was babbling. "I don't know why I did it. I can't understand. Oh, God, he was my friend. We had plans together, dreams together!" He broke into hoarse, uncontrolled sobbing. "Faydon, forgive me, Faydon!"

Officers arrived shortly after that, and led Paul Starman, who had forgotten the future he should never have known, away from the body of the man he had slain.

* Footnote: According to the Staircase Time Theory, around which the time machine in which Starman returned from 1940 to 1920 was constructed, it is inevitable that persons and things in a particular time era are subject to the situations of that era. Hence, the change of Starman, from a fat man of forty-five to a youth of twenty-five, was inevitable. Starman didn't realize this. Neither did he realize that his mental characteristics would return to those he had in 1920, as they did, gradually, while he talked to Faydon. Even had physical and mental changes not occurred, Starman would have been trapped in 1920, for the time machine by which he arrived there, and through which he planned to go back to 1940, couldn't exist in 1920, and must also have vanished.—Ed.

COMING NEXT MONTH!

The Most AMAZING Story Since Homer Eon Flint's "Nth Man"; Ross Rocklynne's Sensational
"BIG MAN"

MOK and the



Again and again Hok struck with all his might—and the shark thrashed the water to foam

GIFT of HEAVEN



By MANLY
WADE WELLMAN

Down from the heavens flashed
the meteor — and from it Hok
forged a powerful new weapon

FOREWORD

THEIR names still clash in our ears, the great swords of old—Arthur's Excalibur, Roland's Durandal, Siegfried's Gram. They make lurid light across the centuries, whether in David's hand, or in D'Artagnan's, or Custer's. The last of them is not yet sheathed or sated.

A mighty warrior and artificer was he who first fashioned and wielded such a blade. The Bible calls him Tubal Cain, the Greeks named him Vulcan. Actually he was Hok, who lived by battle but had no taste for battle's sake, who never tortured a weak foe or feared a strong one; who glimpsed not only the promised strength of cold, sharp iron, but the woe as well.

In those days of man's first youth, hardly anything happened that was not of consequence. The complex brain, the eloquent tongue, the skilful hand, made this two-legged animal ruler of his world. He knew a ruler's joys, sorrows

and cares. Not least of the things which embody joy, sorrow and care is the sword, born in fire, baptized in blood, mirroring the light and dealing the darkness. Nor has its horror and fascination vanished from the Earth we know.

CHAPTER I

THE gift seemed first to be a threat, an assault, hurled from the very cope of the dawn sky in a swaddling of fire to land between two parties of stone-axe warriors intent on bloody battle.

That battle was coming as a logical sequence of the sudden self-importance of Djoma the Fisher, chief of a tribe that dwelt and seined at the seashore. He felt himself the invincible leader of a terrible community of fighting men. Vaingloriously he sent a messenger over wooded hills to the north and east, to inform a certain smaller settlement there that he wanted at once, in tribute, every specimen it owned of that powerful new weapon its chief had invented and called the bow.

But the settlement in question was of the Warlike Flint People, and its chief was Hok the Mighty, who respected nothing save the worship of the Shining One and feared nothing save being bored. Sitting above his village of mud-and-wattle huts, on the threshold of the cave he had won in combat from overwhelming masses of the fierce sub-human Gnorrils,* he grinned in his sun-colored beard and heard out the blustering demand of the envoy. Then he gave the boys of the village leave to drive the stranger away with sticks and stones. In due time the fellow limped home to the seaside, and Djoma led every fighting man he had—more than a hundred—to take the bows by force.

Warned by his scouting hunters to the southwest, Hok marshaled sixty of his own stark fighters on a rise of ground where the invaders must pass. Djoma, marching by night with intent to surprise the Flint People around their breakfast fires, came just at the first gray flush of autumn dawn upon a ready skirmish line of warriors, brawny and bearded, clad in skins of lion, wolf and bear, ready to shoot with the bow or strike with the axe.

In front of these defenders strode Hok himself, taller and broader than any man on the field. The skin of a cave-lion was slung around his powerful loins, moccasins of bull-hide shod his feet. The wings of a hawk were bound to his temples, and he bore in one hand a bow with arrow ready on string, in the other a war-axe with a blade of black flint a full span wide. This latter he tossed high in the air like a baton, catching it deftly as it descended.

"Hai, you strangers, you eaters of fish!" he thundered his defiance. "What do you seek here?"

"We seek those things you call bows," replied Djoma, quickly and to the point. He, too, came forward from his horde, and he showed almost, if not quite, as tall as Hok. Sunlight on the water had long ago burnt him as brown as a field stone, and his black beard spread in a sooty cascade over his broad, bare chest. He carried a stabbing-spear, with a shaft as thick as his wrist and longer than his body. "I sent a man to get them, but—"

"Ho! Ho!" laughed Hok. "Does that man's back still tingle from the drubbing our little sons gave him? We surrender none of our things when proud strangers command them. Come and take them if you can, Djoma the Fisher. I think it is something else you will get, less to your liking than bows."

Djoma roared to his swarthy follow-

* See "Battle in the Dawn", AMAZING STORIES, January, 1939.

ing, which roared back and charged. At once Hok gave an order of his own, and the Flint People lifted their bows. A blizzard of arrows met the onslaught full and fair, striking down men on all hands. The charge wavered, while the defenders quickly set new shafts to their strings. Another deadly volley might have turned Djoma's threatening advance into a rout.

But then there fell from heaven a fiery thing that for the instant made all the dimness of heaven as bright as noon-tide—fell hard and heavy upon the rise of ground which Hok's men held and up which Djoma was trying to charge. It struck where an outcropping of a certain soft black stone showed.

AS the prodigy rocketed down to earth, the two opposing throngs, defending bowmen and rushing Fishers, gave a concerted yell of amazed terror and flung themselves flat on the earth. Only Hok, in the forefront of his party and nearest of all to the place where the thing struck, remained on his feet and gazed. The earth reeled under him, like a treetop in a gale. Next instant, an upflung lump of the soft black stone struck him hard in the face, so that he seemed to whirl away into an emptiness as black as the stone itself.

When his senses crept back into him, the sun was up and bright, and he was alone. Apparently the battle had rolled away from him—he saw only dead, both of his own folk and of the Fishers. It was hot, too. The heat was what had awokened him. It seemed that the earth was afire near by, and a morning wind had sprung up, enlivening the blaze and straining it toward him.

Blinking and snorting, Hok got to his feet. His head ached from the chance blow that had stunned him, but he had been stunned before, and like the later Athenians always treated headaches

with contempt. He gazed about him, wondering again which way the battle had gone. Beside him lay his own bow and axe—his own side must have triumphed, else surely he would have been killed and plundered as he lay helpless. Thus allaying any anxiety, he turned back to the strange fire.

It filled the rift in the slope where the outcropping of black stone had been, now torn open as if by the blow of a mighty axe. The breeze, blowing into the opening, fanned the flame to an intense pallid heat. Hok came as close as the scorching air would allow, peering. He could see the thing that had fallen from the sky, in the very midst of the furnace. It was a round, glowing lump, bigger than his head.

"The Shining One hurled it," he remembered in his heart, "for it came from the sky, his home. Was he displeased with me, or was it a warning? . . . Had he truly wished to, he could have killed me like a fly."

Hok stooped and picked up a piece of the outflung black stone. Tentatively he tossed it at the glowing lump in the hottest heart of the fire. It seemed to him that the black stone vanished at once.

"Hai! The thing eats black stones," he mused. Some paces downhill from the fire showed another outcropping. Going there, Hok pried out great brittle chunks of the stuff and filled his arms with them. They blackened his chest and ribs, but he bore his burden to the fire and threw it in.

"If you are a living thing, from the Shining One, Hok is your friend," he announced. "I will bring you all you wish of the black stone."

He did what he could to fulfill this promise. Again and again he brought as much as he could carry, ripping out great dusty boulders of the material with his huge hands, later by prying at

it with the stout handle of his axe. High he piled the dark heap, shutting away the flames. It made a cairn as high as his chest, and wider across than he could have spanned in three strides. "That should satisfy the thing," he decided.

But he was wrong. There was a crackling and a steaming. Between the bigger lumps darted tongues of the inner fire. As Hok gazed, fascinated and wondering, the whole heap suddenly burst into roaring holocaust. He was forced to retreat before it.

"The black stones burn!" he cried. "Yes, and more hotly than wood!"*

SO small a thing as a battle with invaders was now driven from his mind. The Shining One had thrown down a marvel to him, and it behooved him to see it out. See it out Hok did, while the sun climbed higher and higher, and the blaze shot up higher than a tall tree, died down. Hok was able to approach again. At length there came a rain, a spatter that was brisk but not heavy. The fire, burning itself out, perished. He walked close, his moccasins squelching in the damp.

"Where is the gift of heaven?" he asked the smouldering ashes. With reverent insistence, he poked among them with the butt of his axe.

Something gleamed up, like water, but hard—like ice, but warm. Grunting in his new amazement, Hok scooped the ashes away to either side.

The meteor that had fallen and set so great a fire was reduced by its own works to a jagged piece of fused clinker. But from the heart of it had issued something long and lean and straight, like a sleeping snake. The thing was

still hot as Hok touched it, and he had to drag it forth in a fold of his lion's skin—it was as broad as his three fingers, and well longer than his arm, tapering to a point and harder than any flint he had ever known. Yet, hard as it was, it had a springy temper to it that no stone had ever displayed.* Holding the broad end in wrappings of skin, Hok hefted it.

"The gift of heaven!" he called it again. "This is a weapon, then. But how to use it?"

The rain had abated. Hok bore his find away toward his village, studying it intently with the eye of a master workman.

It already had the beginnings of an edge to either side of it, sharper than his sharpest chipped stone, and its point was finer and leaner than any dagger he knew. As with flints, Hok tried to improve the thing by chipping with a small, heavy hammer-stone. The substance rang to a tone he had never heard before, but showed no breakage or other great effect. He learned to rub and whet, and this made the edge keener. So Hok labored as he strolled on toward home, and as he came thither in the late afternoon he had finished the blade to his liking—with a keen point, a slicing edge, and at the broad end a grip for his hand wound tightly with rawhide thongs slit from his lion's skin.

He grinned and chuckled over the thing. First he would show it to Oloana, his comely wife, who always shared his triumphs and enthusiasms—her midnight eyes would glow like stars at the sight of this new thing. And he would let Ptao, his bright-haired little son, try to lift the thing's long weight. . . .

"Hok! Hok!"

* No formal history can trace the first use of coal, which must have been accidental as in the present example. The early great civilizations knew nothing of coal, but European barbarians before the Roman conquest seem to have used it since prehistoric times.—Ed.

* Meteoric iron generally has from 4 to 10 per cent of nickel, with traces of cobalt, copper, tin and carbon—an alloy that is a makeshift steel, not at all unsuitable for making weapons.—Ed.

HIS brother Zhik, sub-chief under him, was running toward him from the direction of the village. "You live!" he panted.

"Of course I live," said Hok, laying his sword across his arm for easier carrying. "How went the fight after I was knocked over? Did you kill many of the Fishers before they ran?"

"Before—they ran?" Zhik repeated, and shook his tawny head. "But they did not run, Hok—we did."

Hok straightened up and glared, his teeth showing. "Ran? We? How was that, Zhik?"

His brother spread helpless hands. "It was that thing that fell and struck you down. Because it fell toward us—"

Hok clutched Zhik's arm to calm him. "What happened? Speak clearly, and briefly."

The words came out in a tumble. "We were frightened. The Fishers yelled to each other that the spirits fought on their side, and came at us. They drove us before them. You were thought to be dead, and nobody touched you, since heaven itself had claimed your life—"

"But I am alive," Hok assured him again. "Well, and after you ran from them?"

"We ran, thinking the Shining One hated us. But Oloana, when we told her at the village, insisted on going to find your body." Zhik shook his head ruefully. "We tried to make her stay, but she would go—she and Ptao, your son."

Hok suddenly grew chill, as though new and cold rain had fallen upon him. He sensed worse news to come. "Why have I not met them, then?" he asked.

Zhik grimaced wretchedly over what he must say. "The—the Fishers had followed us for some distance, picking up some bows dropped by our wounded.

And they came upon Oloana and Ptao, carrying them back toward their village by the sea."

The glare in Hok's blue eyes grew paler and hotter. His big right hand closed upon the hide-wrapped hilt of the sword that was cradled on his left arm. "They captured Oloana and Ptao?" he repeated. "And no man tried to stop them—not even you, my brother?"

"We thought it was the will of the Shining One, grown angry. We did not know that you were alive—" Zhik broke off, and put his hand on his brother's shoulder. "Come to the village. Eat and rest. We will rally the warriors that are left. When they see that you live, they will follow—"

"There is not time. Go back, and say that I have followed Djoma and his skulking Fishers." Hok suddenly lifted the sword. It caught the glow of the sun in blinding flashes. He flourished it above his blond head bound with the hawk wings.

"The Shining One gave me this," he cried, "and gave me also a deed to do, worthy of such a weapon—I want no help from the others. This sharp Widow-maker will cut me a way through the Fishers, and gain back what I have lost! Good-by, Zhik!"

He spun around and set off at a run, his eyes searching the plain for the tracks of his enemies.

SHANG, the great cave-bear,* had scented food earlier that day—tender meat, human meat—and had followed it hungrily up wind. The first

* The cave-bear, *Ursus spelaeus*, was a larger and heavier creature than his modern cousin, and was a contemporary and enemy of stone-age man. The cave-drawings of Aurignacan and Magdalenian times include many representations of the cave-bear, and at least one cave-bear skeleton shows marks of a fierce attack with stone weapons.—Ed.

chill of autumn, that had turned the leaf-thickets brown and yellow and crimson, had been felt by Shang. He had been eating nuts, adding layers to the store of fat that covered his powerful frame against the long winter sleep in his cavern, and the flesh of man would prove a welcome variant. But there had been too many men, all armed and close together. Shang had watched them from a distance, his big brown body hidden in bushes—dark, bearded males, with among them one woman and one boy, these bound and guarded. Shang's mouth watered for the boy in particular, but he dared not charge the whole throng. Men had a way of fighting as an aggregation. And so he let the horde go by, dolefully and grumpily watching.

It was only a little later that he smelled man again, then sighted him. A straggler? No, for this was of another sort—big and blond and ruddy, this one, and his eyes were on the tracks of the previous party. Shang, wise in animal divination, recognized that he was a stern fighter and a brave one. But Shang did not fear one human being, even as big and resolute-seeming a one as this. He waited until the solitary marcher came within six bounds of the hiding place in the bushes; then, with a deafening cry that was half cough, half roar, he charged.

Hok took one glance at the apparition—a shaggy dun monster almost as large as a bison bull, with an open red mouth that could have engulfed his head at a single snap—and quickly sprang aside. As Shang blundered past and wheeled for another rush, Hok swarmed up the nearest tree, a thriving young beech, and came to rest in the main fork.

Howling and snarling, Shang reared his bulk to a height half again that of a tall man, and with claws like daggers he ripped and tore at the bark of the tree.

But he could not climb after Hok, as a smaller and more active bear might, and the fork was well out of his reach.* Slavering hungrily, he circled the tree and flourished those immense armed paws.

HOK gazed at him, then away toward the west and south. In that direction led the trail of Djoma and the Fisher war party—and Oloana and Ptao. He himself was safe from the ravening beast, but only as long as he remained stranded. What would happen meanwhile? Leaning down, he addressed the big cave-bear:

"Hai, Shang, who would eat me—what if I come down to dispute the matter with you?" He twiddled the sword, that had never left his hand. "I am but one man against your paws and teeth, but the Shining One has given me a fang to match yours. Hai!" he ejaculated again. "I will wait no longer. Prepare to fight for your dinner, Shang."

He paused only to slash away a thick branch of the tree and trim its foliage. The heavy, sharp sword clove the wood as though it were a grass-stalk. Hok grunted his approval, and suddenly tumbled himself out of his perch, landing upright on his moccasined feet, sword and branch lifted in his hands.

"Come, Shang, and eat Hok! He has proved a tough morsel for hungrier beasts than you."

As though he understood the challenge, Shang heaved himself upright on his rear legs again. Monstrous, grossly manlike, he lumbered forward to strike this impudent human thing to earth. Hok laughed, as always in the face of deadly peril. His right hand advanced

* Remains of *Ursus spelaeus* show that, for all the size of the animal, the phalanges bearing the claws were weak, denoting a loss of climbing ability from long dwelling in caves.—Ed.

the sword.

Shang dabbed at the shiny thing the man was holding out. In times past he had encountered weapons, and had knocked their wooden hafts to splinters with sweeps of his paws before descending upon the unarmed wielder. But he barely touched the iron, then snatched back his big forefoot with a howl of pain. The edge, whetted assiduously by Hok, had laid open Shang's calloused palm to the bone.

"You taste the Widow-maker, Shang," Hok taunted him. "Come, try with that other paw."

Shang was not one to give up for one wound. He tramped closer, both arms lifted, his mouth open and steaming. Hok gazed for a long, meditative moment, down that gaping throat. Then he suddenly sprang to meet the huge beast.

His left hand thrust with the branch, jagged butt foremost. It went between the open jaws, stabbing the gullet cruelly. A strangled yell rose from Shang's deep chest, and both paws struck at the stout billet of beechwood. Hok, safe for the moment from blow or hug, struck with what he held in his right hand.

The gleaming gray blade, swift as a serpent's tongue, pierced Shang's broad belly. As it went home, Hok ripped upward with all his strength, drew his weapon clear and sprang backward as far as he could. Shang, still erect, stared and gestured stupidly. Then he toppled forward, with an abrupt thud that shook the earth.

Hok waved the sword, now running blood to its hilt.

"The gift of heaven is a great marvel and magic," he exulted. "What spear or axe could have slain Shang so swiftly?"

From his head he stripped the hawk wings and tossed them on the subsiding

body of the bear. If Zhik rallied the warriors and led them after him, they would come upon this evidence of Widow-maker's deadliness, would see by the hawk wings that Hok was the single-handed slayer. It would give them heart after their defeat.

Meanwhile, Hok took up once more the trail of Djoma's band.

WOMAN," said Djoma haughtily, "there is no need for you to look back. You will not see that country again."

Oloana, bound and dishevelled in the midst of the marching Fishers, faced him with an air fully as haughty as his own. So did the lad Ptao, who trudged at her side with arms trussed but with frost-yellow head flung desperately high.

"Hok the Mighty is my husband," said Oloana with murderous dignity. "He will follow and take revenge. Even now he may be on your heels."

At that word it was Djoma who glanced back, suddenly and with furtive excitement, as though Oloana had conjured up a great honey-haired menace. But the back trail, through thickets and over knolls, was empty of any hostile figure. Recapturing his boldness, Djoma sought to wither her:

"I say again that Hok was stricken dead, by the fire-ball sent by his own angry god. He alone dared stand up before it, and in punishment he was slain."

"We passed the place of the battle," reminded Oloana. "I saw other dead, and on the ground lay Hok's bow and his axe, but not his body. He lives and follows. Prepare your skull for smashing, because he will not spare you."

"If he was gone, the angry Shining One carried him away," insisted Djoma. "In any case, my god is stronger than yours—he is the Sea-Father. Did he

not give me victory? Did he not send rain at the moment I captured you, to show that you were his gift to me? Let Hok come, if he still lives. I will shed his blood with this spear." He flourished the weapon boldly, and his men, hearing the vaunt, yelled approval.

"My father will pluck you to pieces like a little roast sparrow," spoke up the proud young voice of Ptao. "When I am grown—"

"And when, cub, will you be grown?" jeered one of the men who marched as a guard beside him. "We will take you to our place by the sea, and there we will eat you."

"I would sicken your narrow stomach," snapped the boy. "Eat fish, and leave strong meat alone."

One or two of the captors laughed at this repartee, and the guard smacked his lips. The march continued in silence.

THE young son of Djoma, a towering youth with a downy black beard that grew in two points, came close to his father. "I am old enough to marry," he ventured. "Let me have this woman we took from the enemy. See, she has dark hair, like our own people. And she is strong and brave and good to look upon. To judge from that sharp-tongued son of hers, she would give fine warriors to make the tribe mighty."

"Speak of this another time, Caggo," bade Djoma gruffly. His own eyes were bright as he studied Oloana sidelong. She strode free and proud, for all her plight. Djoma was remembering that he, too, was without a mate since Caggo's mother had been snapped up by a shark while swimming a year ago. If Oloana had been the mate of one mighty chief, what more fitting than that he take her for himself? "Such things as concern captive women are to be decided by council of the elders," he

elaborated. "Wait until we get home."

Caggo nodded acceptance, but contrived to walk near the prisoner, admiring her frankly. She spat once between his tramping feet, and took no other notice of him.

"We have heard little of you Fishers, for we never troubled ourselves about your country or possessions," she told Djoma balefully. "But now Hok will give you his attention, and you will not find it welcome. I think that stealing me will be the worst day's work you have ever done."

"We will see, we will see," said Djoma darkly, but once again he glanced hurriedly backward. His eyes dilated with sudden panic. Was that a human figure, that thing showing itself briefly among bushes far behind? If so, what did it bear that gleamed like sun on the sea? He looked hard, but saw nothing else. The thing had ducked from sight, if indeed he had really seen something. Djoma cursed himself roundly for letting his nervousness create visions. Perhaps some beast of prey, coming to the deserted battlefield, had dragged away the corpse of the Flint People's chief, because it was the largest there. In any case, Hok was dead. He, Djoma, had seen the fellow fall. And Djoma must remember in the meanwhile his own position as a leader. There must be no appearance of fear.

Yet the feeling could not be rationalized away. That night the band camped by a grass-collared spring, and ate in serious silence its ration of sundried fish. Oloana and Ptao, tied by the feet to a sapling, refused with disgust offerings of such food,* and talked loftily to each other of the vengeance to be taken upon the impudent raiders who had dared use them thus.

* Most inland savages, unfamiliar with fish, are suspicious of it. Both the Apaches and Zulus repudiated it as poison.—Ed.

But as night fell, Djoma looked once more along the back trail that was now too dim to be seen, and gave an order. Some of his warriors unslung the foot-lashings of the prisoners and herded them well away from the camp, binding them again under some low brown bushes. Djoma camped there also, with Caggo and one or two others. They spent the night without a fire—dangerous to do in strange country, but Djoma felt somehow that camping with a fire would be more dangerous still.

There were yells in the night. At dawn, Djoma returned to the main bivouac and learned that at dead of night something had struck down two of his sentries and raged through the camp, killing a third man and injuring five more before it was driven away. Nobody was sure who—or what—the attacker was. The wounds it had dealt were strange enough; deep, clean slashes, terrible to see, and one almost delicate stab.

Djoma ordered a forced march home.

CHAPTER III

THUS Hok, following on their heels, was not able to raid a second night camp, for Djoma marched all that night. He and his men were back in familiar country by now, and made better progress than their lone pursuer, who furthermore had a close call with a black leopard in a little glen between two of the wooded hills. By the next dawn, Hok was far behind in his chase. He wiped Widow-maker clean of leopard blood with a handful of coarse ferns, and studied the trail.

"Here among the warriors marched Oloana," he decided, picking out certain narrow footmarks. "Yes, and here went Ptao beside her—not faltering, but striding out like a warrior. O Shin-

ing One!" and he raised his anxious face to the rising orb on the eastern rim. "Keep my wife and son alive until I come at their captors with Widow-maker, your gift. Keep that chief of the Fishers alive, also—let nothing befall him save at my hand."

He trotted ahead on his grim lone hunt.

In the early afternoon of this third day, he came out from among heights, hills and thickets upon a rocky stretch of plain. Beyond was a ridge of gray granite, with a gnarled oak tree growing at its foot, the leaves turning tawny with autumn's first frosts. The multitude of footmarks, so easy to trace across the soil of forest or meadow, was all but lost on this hard surface. Hok went more than half by guess, up the ridge to the backbone of rock at the top.

It was hot underfoot, with a heat more than that of the autumn sun. Hok paused, looking this way and that. Beyond was more timber, but sparse-grown and stunted by the wind that blew from the sea—he could see that, too, on the horizon, a chill gray gleam like the light reflected from Widow-maker. To his right rose a shimmer in the air, as from a great fire. Hok scowled.

"Have men camped here?" he asked himself, looked again, and crossed the rocks to investigate. The footing grew hotter to his moccasins, but he did not see the cause until he was almost upon it—a deep pit, round and as wide across, perhaps, as a man is tall. That pit was filled with fire, blue and orange, with no discernible bottom or source of fuel supply. Hok came as close as he could, gazing down.

"The Lair of Fire," he said aloud. "I have heard of this place from traveler guests at my cave. It has always been thus, though nobody knows where the fire gets its fuel—fire cannot burn

rocks and earth.* It is a strange matter." He peered into the Lair of Fire again. "It is a good omen that my path should cross here, for fire is of the Shining One, who watches over me at this place."

Silently the blue-yellow flames fluttered, and one of them rose momentarily, pale and lean as the blade of Widow-maker.

"The fire makes me a sign—a sign concerning my weapon," Hok decided. "What is it that you wish to say, fire?"

There was a rose-tinted swirl in the blue heart of the glow, and several flames sprang up, seeming to pen like begging fingers toward him. Hok drew away.

"You want your gift again," he said accusingly. "No, fire. Widow-maker is a gift from the Shining One, not a loan. I need the gift to win back what the Fisher chief dared to steal from me."

The pit glowed redly, as if with sudden anger, and Hok made hasty departure. Going down the other side of the ridge, his feet gratefully found cooler earth. But his mind remained troubled.

Why had there been a sign at the Lair of Fire that he must give up his sword? Did the Shining One repent of his generosity? Was Hok to be warned from the adventure he had undertaken? The big man scowled and wagged his golden head, as though to banish the disturbing mystery from his thoughts. He picked up the trail of Djoma once more, and made speed upon it.

NIGHT had fallen, nippy and moonless, upon a broad bay of the

ocean where Djoma and his followers had their habitation. To seaward flickered a multitude of red lights, the supper-fires of the village, seeming to float on the surface of the quiet water. On shore, just above high tide mark, burned a single blaze of driftwood, with a greenish tinge to it because of the crusting of salt on the sticks. Near by a dugout canoe had been dragged up. Within the circle of light squatted two black-haired sentries, each with his spear thrust into the sand beside him. After the manner of sentries since time's beginning, they grumbled at extra duty.

"How can this pursuer, if he is but one man as it seems, be a threat to our entire people?" demanded one. "I think that Djoma is too easily frightened."

"Do not let him hear you say so," counseilled his companion, "or he will prove his courage by dashing out your brains with his axe. I saw that sun-haired giant at work the night he raided our camp, and he is a fierce one. Perhaps Djoma is right to leave a guard on shore here, where he must come if he is to attack our village. Yet I wish it was another than I who sat here with you." The warrior stretched and yawned. "I am weary from much marching and fighting."

The first speaker sat up more alertly, his ears seeming to prick. "What was that?" he demanded sharply. "It sounded like a scraping or crawling upon the beach, just there beyond the firelight." And he pointed.

The other laughed. "You hear strange things because you are young and nervous. When you are my age, and have stood many night watches, you will be calm and brave. That noise was a snake, or a nesting bird."

The younger man had forgotten his criticism of Djoma. "If the stranger

* The Lair of Fire was a well of natural gas, set ablaze by lightning or other cause, such a phenomenon as exists in many volcanic regions throughout the world.—Ed.

comes—" he began.

"We will both stay awake," his comrade comforted him. "The light of our fire will shine on that strange weapon as he comes. We will both yell, and charge him from either side. Help will come to us at once, many men in canoes from the village."

The plan recommended itself to the nervous one. "We might kill him before any came," he suggested. "Then Djoma would praise us, perhaps make us sub-chiefs. . Listen! I heard the noise again."

His more sober companion had heard it likewise. They both rose swiftly, seizing their spears.

"It came from directly landward of our fire," whispered the less agitated warrior. "Let us move forward a little distance apart, so that we can come up on any stranger from both sides. Then, if he attacks one of us, the other can stab him in the back."

"Well said," muttered the youth approvingly. They advanced with stealthy strides, weapons poised. Again the cooler head of the two was struck with an idea. He snapped his fingers for attention, then pointed with his spear toward a great tussock of broad-leaved vegetation that thrust up from the sand, the only nearby cover that might shelter a man. The two tightened their grips on their weapons, and charged.

AS one they hurled themselves upon the tussock, as one they plunged their points into its heart—just an instant too late.

For Hok, within that shelter, had divined their purpose. He had leaped back and up, just as the spears crossed in the tangle of leaves and drove deep into the sand on which he had been crouching. Next moment he shot out his two long arms in opposite directions,

fastening a hand on each of the swarthy throats of his would be slayers.

Two hairy mouths fell open to scream for help, but Hok's quick grip had been sure and tight. No wind could come from panting lungs to give those mouths voice. Letting go of their spears, the two men strove frantically to tear away the giant fingers that strangled them. But Hok, strongest man of his time and country, laughed harshly, while his double clutch tightened as mercilessly and progressively as rawhide lashings in a hot, dry sun.

"You wanted to find me," he taunted his two victims. "You found me. Ah, you have eaten too many fish, and your mouths gape. You are dying like fish drawn out of the water . . your flappings grow weak, weak they cease."

He released the two limp-grown forms, and they collapsed in one heap at his feet. Hok spurned them, but they were both finished. He chuckled again, without mirth, and rubbed his terrible hands together. Walking forward to the fire and beyond it, he stared at the lights of the village across the water.

"I have disposed of the two warders, and without warning from this place none will expect me out there. What sort of place is Djoma's village—an island?"

Beside him was drawn up the canoe, hollowed by fire from a single log, but Hok did not know how to use such a device. He tested the lashings that moored Widow-maker to the girdle at his waist, then waded quickly into the sea-water. With powerful, silent strokes he swam toward the place where his wife and son were held prisoner.

As he approached through the water, the fire-lights seemed to rise from before him to hang above him—they were kindled at a height. Now he drew close enough to see that an angular blackness,

more solid than the mere gloom-color of the night, rose from the quiet waves. The island must be rocky. He paddled in noiselessly to where there would be a shore.

But there was no shore.

CHAPTER IV

HOK was puzzled, his blue eyes narrowing in the dark. Was he swimming into a sea-cave? Turning over on his back, he groped to right and left with his hands. The cave, if it was such, must be very wide. He let himself float to one side, and collided with wood, apparently a tree-trunk growing out of the water at this point. Puzzled and cautious, he drew himself up and climbed it. For more than his own height he clambered above water level, holding on to old broken branch-stubs. Lifting his hand, he felt wood above him—solid wood, a seeming roof of it. If this was indeed a cave, then the cave was made of tree-stuffs instead of rock-stuffs, with water for floor. Hok slid carefully down again, and swam a little way back the way he had come.

He began to skirt the village, trying to see what it stood on, if not an island. All he could make out at first was a cliff-like overhang that shut away the light of fire and stars. Then, around to one side, he came to where a hut stood at the very edge of things, with a fire at its doorway. People lounged there, talking. Hok lay low in the brine, and by the firelight made out the mystery in part.

The seeming riddle was that this island-thing was truly made of wood—made by man, by Djoma and his tribe, probably started long before them by their fathers. Up from the harbor bed projected tree-trunks, on the forked tops of which had been laid rafterlike poles. These in turn supported close-

laid crosspieces of wood, each the half of a split log with the flat side up. All this was bound by broad lashings of rawhide, dried until it was as old and hard as flint itself. Upon this platform stood huts, of mud-daubed wickerwork with thatch roofs, just as the huts of Hok's own tribe stood on solid earth.

It behooved Hok to learn more about this strange construction. He dipped under water and swam down to the base of one upright log. It had no roots in the sea-bottom, but had been driven there somehow, and was made solid by the heaping of big stones around it. Lashings to cross-bars, which were lashed in turn to other uprights, made it still more strongly set in place. Hok swam on around the village of the Fishers. He saw that it was of the same fashioning throughout—hundreds of big trunks, each painfully hewn on shore with stone axes, then floated out and planted on end in a predecided position, and finally the complex fabric of the platform woven and lashed and built upon the top of this artificial water-forest. He shook his drenched head in wonder. Such a work represented colossal effort and ingenuity. It must have taken years—lifetimes, perhaps. Finished, it gave the Fishers a fortress almost unvanquishable, where they could live securely, protected in the midst of the waters that also furnished their scaly food.*

AT a corner near the shore was a low-set section of platform, its

* Such stilt-supported communities were one of the most elaborate triumphs of prehistoric man's inventive genius, arguing considerable industry and cooperative planning. The most interesting remains have been discovered in old lake beds of Switzerland. Probably others existed at the seashore of the Stone Age and were washed away. Venice and the Aztec capitol of Tenochtitlan were elaborations of the water-town idea, and the savages of New Guinea still build such towns.—Ed.

edges sloping down almost to water level. All around this were tied up the scores of dugout canoes that belonged to Djoma's people. But on this platform was another sentry party, four or five men this time, gathered around a fire that had a hearth of flat stones set in clay. They would discover Hok if he clambered out, probably would kill him before he could gain his feet and defend himself. He must win foothold in the village at another point.

Even as he came to this realization, something made a swishing sweep through the water at him.

He kicked sidewise only in the nick of time. A shark, thrice his length, slid past like a javelin within arm's reach of him, then brought itself round with frightening grace to make another ravenous charge.

Hok dipped his right arm down under water, seizing the hilt of Widow-maker. With a jerk he broke the sword loose from its lashings at his waist. The shark was upon him again, and he saved himself from a crippling bite by putting his left palm on its ugly snub nose, letting himself be carried backward through the water. At the same time he brought up Widow-maker's point, in the knowing way he had already learned. It grated on the coarse sandy hide, and he gave a vigorous shove. A moment later the shark's throat was pierced and Hok threw himself strongly sidewise, dragging on the hilt and opening the wound into a terrible gash.

The shark gave a convulsive leap clear of the water, almost disarming Hok as he dragged Widow-maker clear. It fell back with a mighty splash, and writhed past him, so that its coarse hard hide rasped skin from his shoulder. Hok swam swiftly away, for the commotion had attracted the attention of the sentries on the boat-platform.

With yells and cries the men caught brands from their fire and held them aloft, shedding light over the sea. Hok, coming under the shelter of the higher platform well beyond, saw the waves he had just quitted being churned into awful turmoil.

The wounded shark was being set upon by its comrades—a whole school of them. The harbor must have been well swarmed by the ravenous creatures, drawn to the village of Djoma by the mass of refuse thrown from its platform daily, and it was a wonder that Hok had not been molested before. Even now, some of the sharks that had gathered to the smell of gushing blood turned off to pursue him. With Widow-maker held crosswise in his teeth, Hok swiftly climbed one of the uprights that supported the platform, clinging to it just beneath the cross-logs, while sharks drew silently into a press below him. Immediately overhead there was a thundering, shaking rush—the struggle of the great creatures near the boat-platform was drawing a fascinated throng of Fishers to see and exclaim.

HOK stayed where he was, with enemy warriors and their families racing above him and hungry sharks snapping just beneath his moccasin-soles, until the platform above him vibrated no longer. Then he caught hold of a horizontal pole, drew himself up and swung his weight upon the broad floor that supported the village. Quickly he crept between two of the deserted huts, glancing in all directions to make certain that he had been unobserved. This part of the village, at least, was completely deserted. Hok moved stealthily inward among the press of dwellings, toward a large central one which must be the habitation of Djoma.

This was really a combination building, made up of several huts joined with

tunnel-like passages to make a structure of several rooms that would house the chief, his family and dependents. Here, at least, remained someone—a guard, gazing wistfully in the direction of the torchlight and turmoil. He plainly stayed where he was under orders, to watch over something of value within.

Hok felt that he was close to the thing he had sought. Slipping around the side of the house as noiselessly and grimly as a huge blond ghost, he clove the man's skull with Widow-maker. Leaping across the body as it fell, he entered the place where Djoma lived.

A few coals of fire burned upon a broad hearth of stones set in clay, and he stirred them up with his sword-point. At once he beheld one of the treasures the warrior had been left to protect—the captured bows that Djoma had gleaned from the field of that unlucky battle three days ago. They were bound into a great sheaf, a good load for a strong man. Hok dragged them out, found a place in the platform where a split log was poorly fastened. He cut the stout lashings and pried the slab loose, then pushed the bundle of weapons through and heard it splash beneath. No Fisher would ever use those captured bows nor learn from studying them how to make similar ones—the tide would wash them out to sea. But this was only the smaller item of Hok's double quest. Where were Djoma's captives?

He entered the hut again, peering around in the half-gloom. "Oloana!" he called softly. "Where are you?"

"Hok!" came back a glad cry, and with a leap he was across the floor, hewing with Widow-maker at a woven door that blocked off one of the sections of the multiple hut. The tough withes that had made the basket-like obstruction fell to pieces before his onslaught, and from the dark hole thus exposed Oloana

and Ptao rushed out. He caught one in each arm, and all three hugged, muttered and chuckled in their joy of reunion.

"I knew my father would come," Ptao found breath to say. "I told them that—both Djoma and Caggo. They laughed, but I knew from their eyes that they were afraid."

"Djoma and Caggo," repeated Hok. "Djoma is the chief of these Fisher-folk, I believe, but who is Caggo?"

"The son of Djoma," Oloana informed him. "He has spoken of taking me as his wife. I scratched his face once, and he keeps away, but he swears to tame me."

"I will find occasion to speak to Caggo," promised Hok, "but first, to get you free of this place, which smells of rotten fish."

"That you will never do," growled a voice behind them.

CHAPTER V

IN TENT on freeing his loved ones, Hok for once had relaxed that stern sense of vigilance that every hunter and warrior must have and employ if he will prosper. The Fishers had returned from the diversion made by the sharks, had overheard Hok in the hut, and now they swarmed within the doorway and on the platform outside and around—warriors to the front, armed and fierce. In the fore of the throng stood Caggo, towering up to Hok's height and extending almost as broad across the chest and shoulders. With one foot he kicked up the fire, making light for all to see. His right hand lifted an axe of obsidian, black and broad. Just behind him, with a spear similarly poised, scowled Djoma.

"You did come, Hok," said Djoma in a voice as bitter-cold as the drip from a crag of ice. "I thought you dead,

slain by your own god. Well, it proves that your god is weaker even than I thought. I will do a better job than he."

Hok moved so that his body sheltered Oloana and Ptao. His grip tightened on the thong-bound hilt of Widow-maker.

"The Shining One gave me this weapon," he cried, and the declaration rang like a blow of the sword itself. "Widow-maker has drunk the blood of many Fishers. He will drink more, whenever you move to attack."

"Huh!" snorted Caggo. "I do not fear that shiny thing, which looks more like an icicle than any club or spear. You seek to frighten us by lies, Hok. I myself will cut you down, and that woman of yours will see that I am greater than you and worth having."

He dared to grin impudently at Oloana, who stood behind Hok, and Hok went mad.

"A-hai!"

Widow-maker sang in the air, and Caggo did not dodge quickly enough. The edge took him on the jowl. Away flew his shaggy dark head, like a flung clod. Only the grin remained—the grin and the double-pointed beard—for all the rest had been smitten cleanly from Caggo's body by that terrible slash. And while all the Fishers stared in frozen horror, the grin seemed to relax and grow wry as if, even without a head, Caggo knew that oblivion had come upon him. The lifted axe sank down in the lifeless hand, the knees bent and buckled, the decapitated body sank down and collapsed.

Hok broke that stunned silence with a joyous yell of battle, and charged into the thick of the Fishers. Thrust, slash, hack—three of them were down in the space of as many breaths. The others shrank and scrambled away. Had they not been cramped inside the

narrow door those nearest him might have pressed back and created a rout of the whole party. But the stout walls of mud and wicker hemmed them in with him, and they must fight. All around him they waved their weapons.

"Do not kill!" thundered the voice of Djoma, who had himself retreated into a corner before Hok's rush. "Take him alive—drag him down, bind him!"

IT was easier said than done, but a horrified youth chanced to run blindly upon Hok's point. Widow-maker wedged between two ribs, and before Hok could wrench the iron clear, the others rushed from all sides. They swarmed over Hok like ants. He stumbled and fell, then struggled up with a powerful effort, shaking himself free and striking in all directions. Oloana screamed a warning, but too late—Djoma, running up from behind, struck once with the clubbed haft of his spear. Hok felt a thick blackness swallow up his senses.

He awoke to the impact of many water-drops—he was outside, and it was raining. Many voices murmured around him. Opening his eyes, he saw that dawn was coming among the clouds.

"See, he wakens, he lives," cackled a wrinkled old woman with cruel features. "I thought him dead, he lay still so long."

"Had he died I would have been sorry," responded the voice of Djoma. "Look up, Hok. You are my captive. To show his favor, the Sea-Father sends rain. It is his sign, veiling the weak face of your Shining One."

The prisoner sat up. He was bound with many tight-drawn straps around legs, arms and body—straps of fish skin. The swarthy folk who had captured him had canoed him ashore from their water-girt village, and had laid

him upon a great rock on the beach. Beside him was Oloana, also bound, and little Ptao. They had both been staring anxiously, and as Hok showed that he was alive and undamaged, they had the heart to smile. He smiled back, with an expression full of love and encouragement.

Djoma did not like such evidence of cheer among his captives, for he cleared his throat snarlingly to attract their attention. The light rain flowed down his beard in silvery drops.

"You killed my son, Hok," he said coldly.

"I meant to," replied Hok, his muscles surging against his bonds. "If I were free, and had Widow-maker, I would kill you as well."

"But you are not free," taunted Djoma. "As for the thing you call Widow-maker, it is here." He held out the sword, still bloody from the death-blows Hok had dealt with it. As he spoke, lightning crackled across the sky, and thunder roared.

"Ah," said Hok, "your Sea-Father is not the only one who sends signs. There was a javelin of fire waved by the Shining One."

"But the rain drowned it at once," flung back Djoma. "My god is far stronger than yours."

"Hear him, Shining One," muttered Hok tensely. "Set me free, that I may drive his lies down his throat."

Djoma laughed at the prayer. "Your worship will do you no good, Hok. I have won."

Hok again strove to break the fish-skin cords. They creaked, but held. "Set me free," he challenged, while the rain beat on his head and shoulders. "My bare hands against whatever weapons you choose—even against Widow-maker. We will see then who is the stronger. I dare you to do battle with me!"

IT was a bold defiance, and had its effect upon the listening Fishers who stood grouped all around. They muttered together, perhaps hoping that the test would be made—a fight between chiefs was always well worth watching. But Djoma, whose theological arguments had been so good, had yet another answer ready.

"You shall die without the chance to fight, Hok. Bound as you are, you shall be thrown from the platform of my village where the water is deepest and the sharks are thickest. What they leave of you will bait fish for us. But first," and his black-bright eyes turned toward Ptao, "there is something you must watch."

Hok, too, gazed at Ptao through the downpour, and the fear he would not confess for himself could not be hid as he wondered how the boy was threatened. Djoma noted, and chuckled his triumph.

"You struck down Caggo, my son. So, Hok, I will strike down yours."

For a moment Hok thought that blackness would overwhelm him again. Mightily he strove to gain his feet, but they were bound at the ankles and would not gain a grip on the rock. A great crackling bolt of lightning quivered in the sky, and the rain fell more heavily and coldly. Djoma put forth his free hand, caught Ptao by the shoulder and jerked him erect upon the rock.

"Djoma," Hok choked out, "before all your folk I name you the blackest and lowest of cowards. To kill a boy, a little boy—and bound, at that!"

"Do not speak to him, father," came the steady young voice of Ptao. He gazed fearlessly up into the grinning hairy face of Djoma. "He is less than a snake with a poisoned fang. I am not afraid to die, for my fear would make him happy."

"That is a brave cub," said a watching warrior, with honest admiration.

"So shall he not be allowed to grow up," snapped Djoma. "Look well, Hok. I shall kill him with your weapon, that killed Caggo."

Slowly, with full sense of the drama in the situation, the chief of the Fishers lifted the sword high in air, so that its point rose heavenward in the rain. Hok suddenly cried out, in deep agony of spirit, a last prayer:

"Shining One! Save Ptao and strike down this enemy—let me win us free, and never again shall your weapon be used to stab or strike! I swear this, by the fire you gave my people in the long ago—"

"Useless!" howled Djoma, with a wild ringing laugh. The sword quivered before falling.

Thunder broke open the sky, and down jabbed one more bolt of lightning. The uplifted Widow-maker caught that lightning, glowed as with white heat.

Djoma, his laugh of mockery all unfinished, whirled over and down like a dead leaf. On his face he lay without a tremor. A purple-black wale streaked his body, from the fork of his right hand that had held the stolen sword, down across his shoulder and back, to the heel of his right foot that had stood in a pool of water.

At the same moment, Hok rolled violently from the rock where he had lain, and whipped himself erect. The final summoning of his strength had broken those strained cords of fish skin.

A scooping grab, and he had the sword that had guided down a death of fire upon Djoma. It swung around his head like a crystallized flame.

"Hai! I am Hok—I kill!"

But he could kill only the slowest of the Fishers. For, in deadly terror, they ran before him like deer, diving into the water or scrambling aboard canoes

to escape. Within seconds he stood alone on the beach, astride of the body of Djoma, panting and glaring. He now had time to realize that the rain had ceased suddenly and that the sun, his god, shone in the blue morning sky.

"Hok! Hok!" cried Oloana tremulously from where she lay bound. "Cast us free, and let us be gone."

He hurried to her side. The edge of Widow-maker served to sever the bonds that held his wife and son. The three departed unchallenged from the beach where Djoma lay dead, and to which the Fishers dared not return.

CHAPTER VI

IT was noon when they came again to the Lair of Fire. All three were eating ravenously, for Hok had not tasted food since before the first battle with Djoma, and neither Oloana nor Ptao had been able to stomach the unfamiliar provisions of fish offered them. On their march home they had picked handfuls of berries, acorns and rose hips to stay their hunger. But Hok ceased munching as he came to the granite ridge and looked beyond to where flames rose stealthily from their pit, as though to peer at him. His face grew grave and intent, as when he thought deep thoughts.

"I do not like this place," said Oloana. "It is too warm underfoot."

"Wait here," rejoined Hok briefly, and approached the Lair of Fire alone. He walked gingerly but as became a chief, carrying Widow-maker with him. His wife and son watched with curious eyes.

At the brink of the flame-pit, Hok took his stand. His nostrils drank the pungent, half-smothering odor of the rising gases. He began to speak:

"You asked me for Widow-maker once, and I refused. I thought then

that only Widow-maker would win back Oloana and Ptao. I was wrong to think it, for Widow-maker was almost turned against us. Only my prayer and promise caused the Shining One to fight on my side, throwing fire down to destroy the chief of the Fishers and to prove that their god, the Sea-Father, is weak and of little account."

He paused. There was a whispering noise far beneath in the glowing depths, as though the creature that breathed out the fire was agreeing with him.

"You, being of flame, are kin to the Shining One," continued Hok formally. "I vowed to him that Widow-maker would not be used again after we were set free. I now keep that vow. You asked for it once. Here it is."

His hand yearned to keep its grip on the good sword that had served him so famously, but he forced himself to cast it in. The bright gray blade seemed to float on the surface of the fire for a moment, as though the uprush of gas supported it. Then it was gone from view, gulped away into the abyss. Up shot a tongue of flame, seeming to make acknowledgment of the returned gift.

"It was not a gift to me—only a loan," said Hok, and retraced his steps to where the woman and boy waited for him.

LEADING the way down the other side of the rocky rise, he paused once more under the gnarled oak tree that grew there. His big hands fastened upon a low-growing bough, and with a sudden exertion of his strength he

*Manly Wade Wellman, creator of Hok, the Caveman, has placed in these stories what is perhaps the most accurate and basically true story of the rise of man from the primitive that has ever appeared in fiction.

Hok may never have existed, as Hok, but he did exist as the first of the true men, under whatever name he was known by. He did find the first stone axe. He did invent the first bow and arrow. He did fashion the first sword. This story

ripped it loose. Stripping away the twigs, he tested the balance of this rough club, and nodded approval.

"It will serve to fight off any dangers that may rise on our way home," he announced.

Ptao's blue eyes, already bright with the dawning enthusiasm for the hunt and the war-trail, appraised the makeshift weapon. "Why did you not keep the bright thing you call Widow-maker?" he asked. "It was splendid to fight with. No axe or spear or club was ever so deadly."

"I know it, my son," nodded Hok, "but I had spoken a word of promise to do as I did. And words of promise, you know, must be kept."

"True," agreed Oloana, glad of a chance to impress a lesson in ethics upon her youngster.

The boy nodded his bright head in imitation of his father. "Yet," he continued, "it was mighty in your hand, and it would have been mighty in mine, too, when I was grown and had become chief after you."

Hok smiled at that, in understanding and comradeship.

"You speak wisdom, son of mine. In my hand and in yours, Widow-maker would be a good thing. Yet, after we are both gone, who knows? A man like Djoma, or worse than Djoma, might make the good thing bad. It is best that the gift of heaven go back whence it came."

They resumed their homeward march. And so, for the time being, the dawn of the Iron Age was delayed.*

is the story, in imaginative form, of how he may have fabricated the first metal weapon of this kind. Indeed, the way he *must* have made it. And he did live the sort of life Mr. Wellman has pictured here.

Author Wellman has presented here, in sugar-coated form, a true picture of the beginnings of man, and while he wrote to entertain you, perhaps his motive was also to teach—because knowledge is progress. Hok progressed that way.—Ed.


OBSERVATORY
 by THE
Editor

Suddenly there was a terrific crash. With stunning abruptness complete darkness descended, and everything went black for the parrot for a moment.

WHEN at last it could see again, its cage was adrift on a bit of floating wreckage, and far off, in the night, the liner was sinking. The parrot watched it sink, eyes wide, unblinking.

Then, close by, the parrot saw something white, shiny. It was the magician's bald head. It came to the surface, then slowly sank out of sight. The parrot stared hard at the spot where it had disappeared. The head came up again, broke the surface, and went down for a second time. Still the parrot stared. A last time the bald head appeared, then, slowly, it sank and was gone.

FOR a long time the parrot kept its eyes on the spot. It strained for another sight of the magician. But he did not reappear. Then the parrot looked slowly about the whole empty expanse of ocean, and blinked its eyes solemnly, utter astonishment evident in every feather.

At last, after many moments one awestruck word broke the silence of the night. Said the parrot:

"*Amazing!*"

YOU may remember that on last September 1st and 2nd, Chicago was host to the World Science Fiction Convention. Well, on page 130 you'll find an interesting story about it, together with pictures taken at the convention. Since *Time* didn't have room for it between war news, we are pinch hitting for *Time* and giving you the story as that magazine might have presented it.

OUR April issue contains a real treat for old-timers. L. Taylor Hansen is coming back at long last with a corking good story. If you enjoyed "The Prince of Liars," which is today a

classic of science fiction, you'll like this new one. It's called "Lords of the Underworld" and it is the inspiration for a swell painting by J. Allen St. John, whom we persuaded to desert Burroughs for once, and give his skill to a great story.

ALSO coming in the April issue is a yarn that will remind you of still another classic. It's "Big Man," and it's by Ross Rocklynne. A long time ago, Homer Eon Flint, who isn't an Earthman anymore, wrote a yarn he called "Nth Man." Now Rocklynne has done the old idea over again, but he isn't exactly a "man." He's just a kid; and you'll find yourself moved to some pretty deep emotion as you get to know him. He's a tear-jerking character if ever science fiction had one.

YOU liked Jep Powell, our newest writer, with his initial success, "The Synthetic Woman." We predict you'll go for his latest, a paradox story called "Murdered—Yet Alive."

IF you like Edgar Rice Burroughs, you won't want to miss the March issue of *Fantastic Adventures*, on sale January 20. It has the first of a new series of stories about that popular hero of Venus, Carson.

It is titled "Slaves of the Fish Men" and is illustrated by J. Allen St. John, both with a cover painting in full color, and with interior illustrations. Here's another one for your art collection!

JOE MILLARD, who does the best articles in the business, has graduated to a full-time basis in the big city. He's taken up his abode in N'Yawk, and is now pounding out more wordage than we care to count. Congrats, Joe, but don't quit writing those grand articles.

NELSON S. BOND writes: "Whaddya mean you discovered me?" We can hardly claim that much credit, Mr. Bond, for, as you say, you have appeared in other magazines in other fields over a hundred times. We do claim, however, that we recognized in you a writer who would go far in this, to you, new field. Would your readers say we were wrong? Absolutely not!

AND with that, we close up this month's session at the eyepiece. Happy reading! *Rap*



"It's a message from Mars. They want to know if it's okay to send it collect?"

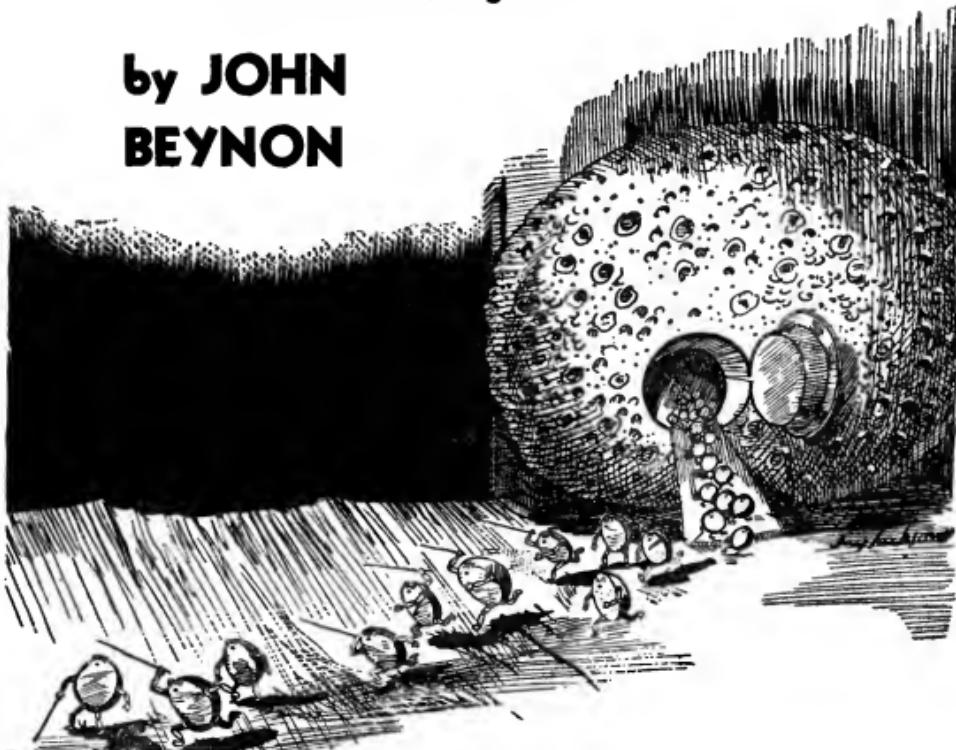
PHONEY METEOR



There, towering hundreds of feet into the air, was a monster too incredible to describe!

**Down through the night above war-torn
London screamed a projectile. Was it a
"secret weapon," a meteor from space,
or was it something else . . . ?**

**by JOHN
BEYNON**



"**Y**OURS, Sally. Double score wanted for the honor of the Post," said Graham.

Sally took the darts, and concentrated. The first went high; the second low. She poised the last carefully.

Everyone regarded the board with breathless attention. The other side was too good to be given any unnecessary chances. Prestige hung in the balance for the Warsbury A.R.P. Post—also a case of beer, and the Post was justly proud of the fact that it had not had to pay for a case of beer for some weeks past.

Sally Fontain drew back her arm, started to throw

At that exact moment the floor shook under her feet. Somewhere outside there was a thunderous crash; the glass in the sandbagged windows jiggled and rattled. Sally's dart flew wide, glanced off a tin hat and imbedded itself in the toe of a gum-boot.

For a moment no one moved or spoke, then one of the visiting team reached for his cigarette case.

"Do you suppose," he inquired, carefully as he opened it, "Do you suppose that's God or Hitler?"

Nobody answered. All the other seven stood waiting, tensely expectant of a second crash. It failed to come; an unusually deep silence seemed to have settled over everything.

Sally moved first. She negotiated the screen of blankets, opened the door and put her head into the outer darkness. There was no sound but a soft swish of the wind in the bare branches.

"If it was thunder, it ought to come again," the visiting spokesman was maintaining as she came back, "but if it was Hitler it makes it a natural hazard and our turn."

"I can't see or hear anything," she said. "Do you think we ought to have a look around?"

Graham Toffts scratched his head.

"We ought to have had the warning," he pointed out aggrievedly. "If it's a raid you're supposed to stay here till we get the all clear. If it isn't, it's none of our business and . . ."

The sudden buzz of the telephone cut him short. He leaped to the desk and picked up the receiver.

"This is Church-Warsbury 69," he said.

He listened.

"The message is white," he dutifully repeated.

Putting the telephone down he reached for the log book of the Post and began to enter the time of the call. Then with his pencil on the paper he suddenly looked up.

"Did I say the message was white?" he inquired, surprisedly.

"You did," they assured him as one man.

"That's funny. The last entry here is for Tuesday."

He considered the telephone thoughtfully for a moment. Then he picked it up again and gave a number.

"Did you say," he asked, "that the message was white?"

"I did," a voice assured him.

"And that means 'cancel all previous messages'?"

"Sure."

"Well, what was the previous message?"

"I don't know, old boy. We never had one."

"Then what the devil . . .?"

"Just obeying instructions, old man. Now do you mind getting off the . . ."

"Wait a minute," said Graham. "There's been a big noise here, do you . . .?"

"I thought he was in London."

"No, I mean something went bang . . ."

"Probably termites undermining your Post. Now get off the line there's a good chap, I've got to ring the other Posts." The instrument died.

"Idiot," murmured Graham, as he hung up.

"Pretty well establishes that it wasn't Hitler," remarked the visitor, "so Sally had better throw that one again."

AN hour later their turn of duty ended. The relieving wardens were greeted by the information that the Post was another case of beer to the good and by inquiries as to what had been responsible for its near loss. The newcomers, however, had little to tell. Only that the village had been roused by the crash, but finding that no air-raid warning was sounded, had gradually settled down and returned to bed.

The visiting dart players had taken themselves off half-an-hour before, and now their two co-wardens slipped away. Graham waited while Sally tucked her trousers into her boots and

watched her pull the light blue lined hood over her fair hair. She smiled at him through the mirror. They wished a quiet night to their successors, and went out into the darkness.

The air was chilly. Sally took deep breaths of it, refreshing herself and driving the warm mugginess and smoke of the Post out of her lungs. The new moon had set, but the sky was clear with enough light to bring first branches, then hedges, then the road itself slowly into visibility. She looked up into the star stippled heavens and drew another satisfying breath. Her fur gloved hand slipped under Graham's arm.

"I love it," she said. "I want it."

"Darling, how comprehensive. Crying for the sky."

"It's more than sky now," she said. "Before all this beastliness started it was just the sky. But now it's—I don't know, it's a piece of reality, I think. I'd like to spread my arms and float into it, swim in it, away from all this. It's still real, but we are in a nightmare."

There came the faint, increasing drone of an airplane. Searchlight beams shot out sweeping this way and that, fantastic because they looked like solid wands yet they neither broke nor bent as they whipped across the sky. One of them and then another found the machine, a tiny bit of silver paper high, high up, then they lost it. They flicked about a little, seemed to lose interest, and shut themselves off one by one. The plane buzzed on its way.

"That's not real, you know," said Sally. "It's a lunatic's dream."

"Shakespeare more or less fore stalled you: 'Life is a tale told by an idiot,'" said Graham.

She nodded. "Of course. I sometimes wonder that literature survived Shakespeare, considering that he fore stalled pretty well everybody in all

they want to say.

"Do you think that out there," she went on, waving a furry hand to include the whole sidling galaxy, "there are tales told by sane men? It'd be a relief to know it, somehow, even if one could never get there."

"May be, but they'll have their own problems. Their ancestors will have made their beds, and now they and their children must lie on them."

"You're very quotational tonight, aren't you?"

They reached a fork in the road. Sally paused.

"Well, good-night, Graham."

He pressed her arm firmly under his own.

"Not at all. I'm going to see you safely home."

"It's late. I can tackle the perils of Warsbury myself."

"I know. Tough girl and all that. It was merely my way of indicating that I would like to continue the pleasure of your society. Come along."

"I don't think," she said, "I'm quite as tough as I hoped. I jumped like hell at that bang tonight—and nearly lost the beer as a result."

"Hang it. We all jumped like hell. Who wouldn't? I wonder what it was? If there'd been anything near here to blow up, I'd say it had, but there isn't. Not that I know of. Have you heard of a dump of any kind?"

She shook her head.

"Nothing nearer than the anti-aircraft people at Haxett—and that bang can't have been six miles away. A boiler, perhaps?"

"No domestic boiler could make a row like that. I don't. Hullo, what do you suppose is going on over there?"

He pointed to a bright light flashing erratically on the further side of a

clump of trees.

"Two thicknesses of tissue paper over the bulb," he observed. "Not that anyone much seems to pay any attention to the rule, but there are limits."

THHEY passed the trees and had a clearer view. Someone was playing a powerful beam of undimmed brilliance back and forth across the grass.

"That's one of our fields," said Sally. "What on earth . . . ?"

"I'll go over. You stay here."

"Rubbish," she retorted.

They climbed the fence together.

The holder of the lamp was too intent on his mysterious occupation to notice their approach until Graham spoke. At the sound of his voice the lamp jogged suddenly and switched in their direction, dazzling them.

"Damn it. You made me jump," said an aggrieved voice.

"Daddy," said the girl, "what on earth do you think you're doing?"

"I'm looking for something."

"At this time of night. And you, a warden's father, breaking the lighting regulations. I'm ashamed of you. What have you lost?"

The lamp was lowered so that it played on the ground as they approached.

"Well, I've not exactly lost anything," its holder admitted. "But something fell. You may have heard it—quite a loud noise about an hour and a half ago."

"Certainly we heard it. We thought it was an explosion."

"Oh no. Something definitely fell. I'd just taken the dog out. There was a flash—a dim sort of flash in this direction, and then the noise."

"A plane crashing?"

"No, I don't think so. It was a single bang. An airplane wouldn't have made nearly so much noise unless it was

carrying bombs—and if it had been bombs I should have seen them explode. No, it was something else, I'm sure, but I haven't been able to find anything. I was just thinking of giving up when you came."

"I should. It's pretty late," Graham advised.

"Besides," added Sally, "you may attract some warden who isn't related to you. And you've no coat! Come along in and have a warm drink at once."

Mr. Fontain switched off his lantern and stepped toward them resignedly.

"All right," he agreed meekly. He turned to Graham. "Are you thinking of marrying this young woman?" he inquired.

"I—er—well—um—that is to say—" began Graham, with some embarrassment.

"Don't," advised her father. "Too bossy, you know. Much too bossy."

GOOD morning," said a voice, thin, distorted but still unmistakably Sally's over the telephone. "Your line's been occupied a long time."

"That, my dear, was the Chief Warden. I may as well tell you right off that he wants to know not only who let off the bang last night and scared half the countryside, but also who was fooling about with what appeared to be a private searchlight. I knew nothing of either. Truth in the first case; sentimental weakness in the second."

"Oh, Graham. You lied to save my family name?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, listen, I can make you some return. We've found the thing that made the bang—at least, that is we've found where it banged."

"Oh?"

"Yes, in a little spinney just beyond where Daddy was searching."

"What is it?"

"Oh, we've not got it yet. It broke a lot trees and buried itself in a hole. Daddy's getting some men to dig. He thinks it was probably a meteorite."

"I'd better tell the Chief Warden or the Police or something, and get them to send someone along."

"Why?"

"Well, I mean, suppose it's not a meteorite. Might be Hitler's secret weapon."

"Hitler's secret, my aunt," said Sally, briefly.

"Anyway, I'll pass it on and then come round. See you in half-an-hour," Graham told her, and hung up.

* * *

Extract from the Journal of Onns

AS AN INTRODUCTION to the notes which I intend to keep I can scarcely do better than to give the gist of the talk given to us on the day before we left Forta¹ by Excellency Cottafts. In contrast to our public farewell, this meeting was deliberately made as informal as a meeting of several thousands can be with the object of making it clear that, though there were leaders for convenience, there was no least amongst us.

Excellency Cottafts made that clear almost in his opening words.

"There is not one of you men and women² who is not a volunteer," he said. And as he spoke he looked slowly round his huge audience. His voice was amplified, but its tone remained natural; his manner was that of one talking to us, not one of a speechmaker.

"You have volunteered," he repeated. "In every one of you, since you are in-

¹ Onns gives no clues to Forta's position. Opinions are still divided as to whether it is a planet, a moon or an asteroid.—Ed.

² The terms "men" and "women" are used not biologically, but in the sense of the dominant species referring to its own members.—Ed.

dividuals, the proportions of emotions which led you to do so are different in detail, but, however personal or altruistic your impulses may be, there is a common denominator in all of us: it is the determination that—the race shall go on.

"Tomorrow the Globes go out.

"Tomorrow the consciousness of Forta puts its supreme strain on Nature.

"Civilization from its beginning is the ability to coordinate and direct natural forces—and once that direction has been started it must be maintained unless the end is to be terrible indeed. There have been other dominant species on Forta; they did not direct nature: they lived, increased, dwindled and died as conditions changed. We have met conditions as they changed—in a world vastly different from that our remote ancestors knew; we not only survive, we flourish.

"We flourish, moreover, in such numbers as undirected Nature could never have maintained. In the past we have surmounted problem after problem; now we find ourselves faced with one which seems to us greater than all the rest. Our world is senile; we are not. Ours are young spirits in a failing body.

"Or let me put it another way. This is our house, our home. We were born here. For centuries we have adapted it, kept it going, substituted, patched it until now there is little more with which to patch it. It is beginning, more than beginning, to deteriorate. Now, while we are healthy and strong, now is the time for us to find a new house.

"You understand that we must delay no longer or you would not be here. There will be our great grandchildren and their great grandchildren on Forta, but life will be harder, more time will be spent in the effort of keeping alive. That is why we must go now while we have strength and wealth to spare."

HE paused, looking slowly round the hall again.

"And after the Globes have gone, what then?

"For us on Forta a slow decline? I trust so. Terrible things have been predicted, I know. Anguished bloody struggles for survival, relapse into savagery. That may be, but I think not. I prefer to believe that we can teach our race to grow old gracefully, naturally and to die at last gently as an old, old man dies.

"But for you, what? That is a thing that no man can tell, and at which guesses are merely vain. You go in the Globes to the four corners of the heavens. All our arts and skill will set you on your courses. We can do no more after that than pray that you, our seed, will find the fruitful soil."

Again he paused. This time so long that he seemed to have forgotten us. At last he went on.

"Your charge you know or you would not have offered yourselves. Nevertheless, it is one which you will not be able to learn too well, nor teach too often. In the hands of each and every one of you lies a civilization. Every man and woman is both the receptacle and the potential fountain of all that Forta has ever been. You hold the history, the culture, the civilization of a planet. Use it. Use it well. Give it where it will help. Learn more and improve it if you can. Do not try to preserve it intact—to be real a culture must live and grow. In you we see the future of the race; but do not cling to the past or there will be no future.

"But do not forget the past, heed its warnings. There have been triumphs and failures, experiments that succeeded, ideals that turned out to be false. There have been good intentions with bitter, bloody aftermaths, mistakes which seemed about to wreck us. But

we have won through, and it seems to me as it must seem to you that we hold a trust, not only for our race, but for all conscious life wherever it may be.

"Go forth, then, go forth in wisdom, kindness, peace and truth.

"Our prayers go out into the mysteries of space with you—our children."

IHAVE looked again at our new home through the telescope. We are, I think, lucky. It is a planet which is neither too young nor too old. Conditions were good with little cloud. It shone like a blue pearl, and I was able to see more of it than ever before. Much of it was covered with water—more than two-thirds of it, they tell me, is under water. It will be good to be in a place where irrigation and water supply cannot be one of the main problems of life. Nevertheless, one hopes that we are fortunate enough to make our landing on dry ground, if we have the ill luck to land in one of the oceans it will make our task much more complicated in the beginning.

I looked, too, at the places to which some of the other globes are bound, some small, some large, some new and clouded so that their surfaces remain a mystery, at least one old, in little better case, it would appear, than our own poor Forta—though the astronomers tell me that it really has the ability to support life for several million years. All the same I am glad we are going to our blue, shining world; it seems to beckon, and I am filled with a hope which does much to diminish my fears of the journey.

Not that my fears trouble me so much now as they did at first. I have managed in this last year to teach myself some fatalism about that. I shall go into the Globe, I tell myself, the anaesthetic gas will lull me to sleep even while I am unaware of it. When I wake

it will be on our shimmering new world. If I do not wake, something will have gone wrong, but I shall never know it.

That's how it is—so simple. It is only in the night that my fears come back, and I wake up shivering at something I cannot remember: would it be, perhaps, the fear of fear?

I went down this evening to look at the Globes, to see them objectively for the last time. Tomorrow all will be bustle and preparation; there will be no time for reflection—that will be as well.

What a staggering, amazing, one would almost say impossible, work they are. The making of them has entailed labor beyond my comprehension. Over 700* feet in diameter they look more likely to crush the ground and to sink into Forta than to fly off into space. What mighty masses of metal. We must pass tomorrow through a corridor in solid metal 144 feet long before we reach the interior space. Twenty of these metal mountains we have built with toil, sacrifice and hope. Twenty of them.

And some will be lost . . .

Oh, God, let those of us who survive never forget. Let us be worthy of this supreme effort.

It may be that these are the last words that I shall ever write, but if I live, it will be in a new world and under a strange sky that I continue. For me Forta ends tomorrow.

* * *

"YOU shouldn't have touched it," said the Chief Air Raid Warden severely. "It should have been left where it was until the proper authorities had inspected it."

* Measurements are expressed in relative terms. That is to say that taking Onns, an average Fortan, as standing in his own estimation some 6 feet high, his Globe would appear to him to be 720 feet (240 yards) in diameter.—Ed.

There was a touch of the resuscitated war-horse about the Chief Warden. For a long time his words had had no more weight, save in his own home, than the next man's. Now he was able to give orders again and though obedience was scarcely up to Army standards people did have at least to listen. He was feeling better and busier and more himself these last few months than he'd felt for years.

"And who," inquired Mr. Fontain, patiently, "are the proper authorities for the inspection of meteorites?"

"That is beside the point. In war time any unusual happening should be reported to the police at once. How could you be sure it was a meteorite?"

"Because it looked like one. Anyway, how could the police be sure?"

"It's their job to make sure first that it isn't any new kind of enemy device, or—or—secret weapon."

"They, of course, knowing all about secret weapons? Do you represent the police?"

"No, I . . ."

"Then may I ask . . ."

Sally considered it time to break in hurriedly.

"Well, we shall know what to do next time we have a meteorite, sha'n't we? But suppose we all go and have a look at the thing. It's in the shed now, and looking quite harmless."

She led the party of four round to the yard, still talking to stave off a row between the Chief Warden and her father.

"It didn't go very deep and the men soon had it out. We expected it to be quite hot still, but it was barely warm so that they could handle it quite easily."

"You wouldn't say 'quite easily,' if you'd heard the language they used about the weight of it," her father put in.

"Here it is," Sally said, pushing open

the door of a single story shed.

The others followed her in.

THE meteorite was not impressive to look at. It stood on the bare boards in the middle of the floor, a rugged, pitted, scarred, metallic-looking ball some thirty inches in diameter.

"Not much to make such a fuss about, is it?" said Mr. Fontain.

The Chief Warden did not care for the use of the word "fuss."

"It's the principle of the thing," he reproved. "Must do things in proper order in wartime. The Inspector and the Military Expert will be here to examine it shortly. Until they have done so it shouldn't be touched again."

Graham did not take this literally. He laid his hand on the surface and found that the outside at any rate was almost cold now.

"What's it made of?" he asked, curiously.

Mr. Fontain shrugged his shoulders.

"It's just a chunk of meteoric iron, I imagine. Nothing very special about it as far as one can see. If it is a secret weapon, it strikes me as a remarkably poor one," he added, pointedly.

"Never can tell what they'll be up to, what with magnetic mines and so on," said the Warden.

He looked over the object with a not very convincing air of one observing subtleties in it which had escaped lesser intelligences, but found himself without further comment to offer.

"If I were you I should lock the door until the authorities arrive," he said, as the group moved off.

On the threshold he paused.

"What's that sizzling?" he inquired.

"Sizzling?" said Sally.

"Kind of hissing noise. Listen."

They stood still, the Warden with his head slightly on one side.

There was undeniably a faint, high

note just within the range of audibility. It was elusive, uncertain and difficult to place.

By a common impulse their heads turned, and four pairs of eyes regarded the metal ball uneasily. Graham hesitated and then stepped forward. He leaned over it, his right ear turned toward it.

"Yes," he said, "it is."

His eyes closed and he swayed. Sally ran forward and caught him as he sagged. The others helped her to carry him outside. In the fresh air he revived at once.

"That's funny," he said. "What happened?"

"It's what's going to happen that's important," said the Chief Warden, with an ill-concealed air of triumph. "It came from that thing, did it?"

"Yes. It came from there all right."

The Chief Warden turned to Mr. Fontain.

"If you have an air raid shelter, sir, I should suggest that we adjourn there and take our gas masks. I don't trust mysterious 'meteorites' that sizzle."

"HEY!" bawled a powerful voice. "Is there anyone about here?"

The Chief Warden set down his whisky glass and made his way into the open. The others followed. The police Inspector and three officers were standing on the drive in front of the house.

"What's going on here?" the Inspector wanted to know.

"Sorry, Inspector. I've sent the servants away, and we didn't hear you come," Mr. Fontain told him.

The Inspector performed introductions.

"These three gentlemen are the official experts," he explained. "Now if you'd be so good as to tell us where this object is . . .?"

"It's in the shed—sizzling," said the

Chief Warden.

"Er—sizzling?" repeated the Inspector.

"Definitely sizzling."

"Oh," said the Inspector. "Oh, I see."

He gracefully left the matter in the hands of the experts.

"We'll manage this if you show us where it is," said the senior officer. "You people had better get back to the shelter. And you, too, Inspector."

The policeman brightened. "Yes, sir."

Graham remained to show the way and to give what information he could. The men listened and nodded.

"Some new kind of gas container," one suggested. "You didn't smell anything?"

Graham assured him that there had been no smell other than the mustiness of the shed, and that if it had been gas it had left no after effects whatever.

In the yard the men put on their service respirators. The senior officer opened the door and walked in while another watched through the window. Through the open door Graham watched the man take two steps into the shed and then sink down in a huddle. The watcher at the window stepped back took a deep breath, dashed inside and dragged his superior out. In the open air the man revived even before the others had got the respirator off his face.

"Queer," he murmured, "very queer. No smell, no taste, nothing—and yet it goes right through the respirator before you know what's happened."

He considered.

"Afraid you people will have to clear out for a bit," he said to Graham. "Have to put a cordon round the place while we tackle it. Tell the others, will you?"

DAMN," said Sally when she heard the news. "They're not going to

blow it up, are they?"

Graham was of the opinion that they would be more anxious to understand it than to destroy it if it could be helped.

"Oh, well that's not so bad," she said, relieved. "I thought they might damage the house."

"It might blow up of itself," suggested the Chief Warden, with a cheerless hopefulness.

* * *

Extract from the Journal of Onns.

IT IS BEWILDERING. Has it happened? Or have we failed? It is hard to believe either. Was it an hour, a day, a year, or a century ago that we entered the Globe? How can one tell? But, no, it was not an hour ago; I know that because my limbs are tired and my body aches.

They told us about that.

"You will feel nothing," they said, "nothing until after it is over. Then you will feel sore and physically weary because your bodies will have been subjected to great strains and there will be a sensation of weakness. That should pass quite soon, but we shall give you some capsules of concentrated food and stimulants to overcome the effects more quickly."

I have taken one capsule and I can feel the benefit of it pouring through me already. But it is still hard to believe.

We climbed the long passage into the Globe so short a time ago it seems. Inside we dispersed as we had been instructed. Each of us sought his or her elastic compartment. We crawled inside. Carefully one inflated the space between the inner and outer walls of the compartment. Gradually the lining distended. One was lifted on a mattress of air, the top bulged down, the sides closed in, pressing gently, until he was

insulated from shocks in all directions. Then one waited.

Waited for what? I still cannot say. One moment, it seems, I lay there fresh and strong: the next, tired and aching.

It is over, or, rather, it is just beginning. The anaesthetic has seeped out, the air intake has been at work. That must mean that we have arrived. We are on that beautiful shining blue planet, and Forta will be only a speck in our heavens.

I feel different for the knowledge. All my life hitherto has been spent among a forlorn people on a world under the imminent sentence of death, where the greatest enemy was a lethal discouragement which must be checked lest it spread like a plague. Here there will be work, hope and life; a world to build and a future to build it for.

Great tasks await us. And what else? As I lie here I can hear the drills at work cutting a way out for us into a new life. What, I wonder, shall we find? A savage world where life may be hard at first among perils and with the struggle for survival. We must watch ourselves. It will perhaps be easier for us to keep faith among hardships than among plenty. But whatever this world is like faith *must* be kept.

In us there is a million years of history, a million years of knowledge—that must be preserved. If it is let go even for a generation or two we shall have half-failed, for our children will have to fight their way up again through pain, blood and anguish. Generation upon generation of half-blind will be straining in agony to distinguish the right road from the wrong. That shall not be allowed to happen.

And yet we must adapt ourselves. Who can tell what forms of life there may be here? One could scarcely expect to find intelligent consciousness on

a planet so young, and yet there may be the first stirrings of intelligence. We must watch for them, seek them out, cultivate them. They may be quite different from us, but we must help where we can. We must remember that it is their world. Born of their own planet, their rights are greater, perhaps, than ours—I do not know, it is debatable, but we have no right to frustrate them. We must teach and learn and co-operate until, perhaps, between us we may achieve a civilization greater than Forta's own.

* * *

"WHAT," said the officer in charge, "do you think you're doing with that?"

His junior lifted up the limp, furry body by the tail and held it dangling.

"It's a cat, sir."

"I can see that for myself."

"I thought you might want to inspect it, sir."

"Why should I want to inspect a dead cat?"

The other explained. He had a squad of men busy filling sandbags and piling them around the outer walls of the building for the purpose of localizing the effect of any explosion and directing its main force upward. He himself had risked going into the shed again. He had tied a rope round his waist so that he could be dragged out again if overcome and had kept low, crawling into the place on all fours. These precautions, however, had proved unnecessary. It seemed that the gas had dispersed and the sizzling or hissing had ceased. He was able to approach the ball closely without any ill effects. A short distance from it he became aware of a faint buzzing.

"Buzzing?" interrupted his superior. "What kind of buzzing?"

The other considered.

"Well, sir, the nearest thing I can suggest is a buzzsaw working slowly, a long way off."

"Can't say I've ever heard one, but I think I see what you mean. Well?"

Since it was clear that the thing, whatever it was, was still active, sandbagging operations had been continued. He had forbidden any of the men to go into the shed, but he himself had looked in from time to time during the next hour and a half and found no further traces of gas.

It was at the end of this time that the cat had prowled into the yard. He had induced it to go into the shed as an experiment. There had been no result and he forgot it in directing operations. Half-an-hour later he had remembered it, and, looking in, saw it lying stretched full length near the mysterious ball. On fetching it out he had found it dead.

"Another kind of gas?" suggested the senior officers.

"No, sir. It's rather odd."

He laid the cat's body on the table and turned the head to show the under side of the jaw. A circle of the black fur was burned away and in the center of the burn was a small hole.

"H'm," said the other. He touched the wound, and then smelled his fingers. "Burned hair all right, but no explosive fumes," he said.

"That's not all, sir."

The younger man turned the head over to reveal an exactly similar blemish on the crown. He took a thin straight wire from his pocket and probed it gently through the hole beneath the jaw. The wire emerged from the hole at the top of the head.

"Can you make anything of that?" he asked.

The other frowned. A weapon of minute bore at point-blank range might

have made one of the wounds, but they appeared to be entrance and exit holes of the same missile. But a bullet did not come out leaving a neat hole like that, nor, certainly did it singe the hair about its exit. To all appearance two of these small bullets must have been fired in exactly the same line from above and below the head. And that made no kind of sense.

"No," he admitted candidly. "Have you any theories?"

"No, sir. It beats me."

"What's happened to the thing now?" the other went on. "Is it still buzzing?"

"No, sir. That stopped some time ago. There wasn't a sound from it when I went in to fetch the cat. Quite inert it seems now."

The other older man tugged thoughtfully at his mustache.

"We'll give it an hour or so, just in case," he decided, "and then if nothing's happened I think we'd better move it somewhere where it can be properly examined."

* * *

Extract from the Journal of Onns.

GOD, WHAT frightful place is this! Into what fantastic hell are we condemned? Where is our beautiful blue planet that shone so brave with hope? We do not understand, we are utterly bewildered, our minds reel with the horror of this place. We, the lords of creation cower before the monstrosities that face us. How can we hope to tame a world like this?

We hide now in a dark cavern while Iss, our leader, consults and decides what is best to do. None of us envies him his responsibility. What provision can man make against not only the unknown, but against the incredible? Nine hundred and sixty-four of us depend on him. There were

a thousand: this was the way of it.

I heard the drill stop boring and then a clanking as it was dismantled and withdrawn from its long shaft. Soon after that came the call for assembly. We crawled out of our compartments, collected our personal belongings and met in the central space. Iss himself called the roll. Everyone answered except four; they, poor fellows, had not stood the strain of the journey.

Iss made a brief speech.

It was done, he reminded us, and it was irrevocable. No one knew what awaited us outside the Globe. If it should somehow happen that our party was divided each group should elect a leader and go forward.

"It is long courage, not brief bravery, that is needed," he said. "This is the time for wisdom, not heroics. Remember always that one life lost now means thousands unborn. We must think of ourselves continually as the seed of the future. A handful of precious seed setting ourselves to grow a new civilization—and not one grain can we afford to lose."

He was impressive in his earnestness as he hammered home the responsibility of every one of us.

"We do not know, and we can never know," he went on, "how the other Globes may have fared. And, not knowing, we must act as though we alone had survived and as if all that Forta has stood for lay only in our hands.

"Now we pass into our new lives."

It was he who led the way down the passage so newly bored and he who first set foot in the new land. I followed with the rest, filled with such confliction of feelings as I had never known.

And the world into which we emerged: how shall I describe it in all

its alien quality?

TO begin with, it was gloomy and shadowed, yet it was not night. Such light as there was came from a vast grey panel which hung in the dusky sky. From where we stood it appeared trapezial, but I suspect that was a trick of perspective and that it was, in fact, a square bisected into four smaller squares by two vast dark bars.

In the murk above it was possible dimly to make out faint lines intersecting at strange angles. I could not guess at their significance.

The ground we stood on was like nothing I had known. It was vast, ridged plain and covered with small, loose boulders. The strata had somehow been twisted to the vertical and its edges lay all one way disappearing into the gloomy distance before and behind. Close beside us was a crevasse as wide as my own height, running either way in a perfectly straight line. Beyond it, 150 feet or so away was another crack running exactly parallel to it and similar distances beyond, a third and an indication of a fourth.

The man beside me was nervous. He muttered something about a geometrical world lit by a square sun.

"Rubbish!" I said, shortly.

"Then how do you explain it?" he asked.

"I do not rush into facile explanation," I told him. "I observe; then, when I have enough data, I deduce."

"Well, do a bit of deduction about the noise and the shaking," he suggested, not too politely.

I had been half aware of these things before. Somewhere far away an irregular thudding was going on which resulted in almost constant tremors of the ground beneath us. As I peered round, seeking the source of

the disturbance, an alarming thing occurred. An extra loud thud shook us more than the rest and simultaneously the lower half of the square of light was blotted out. I will not deny it caused me some apprehension. I looked to see the upper half vanish too, but mercifully it did not.

By this time we were all assembled outside the Globe and waiting for Iss to give directions. He was about to speak when we were interrupted by a new sound. A kind of regular soft padding, sometimes with a rasping scratch accompanying it. For a moment we were all frozen with apprehension and before we could move, the most fearsome monster emerged from behind the Globe.

Every historic traveler's tale pales beside the reality of the thing we now saw. Never would I have believed that such a creature could exist had I not seen it myself. First there came a face thrusting round the side of the Globe, hanging in the air 250 feet above us. It was a sight to make the bravest of us recoil.

Black it was, so that against the darkness overhead it was difficult to be sure of its outline, but it broadened at the top and above the head itself one seemed to catch a glimpse of two towering pointed ears. It looked down on us from two vast glowing eyes which were set aslant and can have measured no less than 12 feet from corner to corner.

FOR a moment it paused, the great eyes blinked and then it came closer. The legs which then appeared were like massive pillars, yet they moved with a dexterity and control unbelievable in members so vast. Both legs and feet were covered with closely set fibres which looked like strands of shining black metal. It

bent its legs, lowering its head to look at us more closely and the fearful stench of its breath blew over us. Its face was still more alarming now. It opened a cavern of a mouth, an enormous pink tongue flicked out and back. Above the mouth pointed spines, some of them 50 feet and more long, stood out sideways, trembling. The eyes were still fixed on us, cold, cruel, non-intelligent.

Until then we had been transfixed, but now panic took some of us. Those nearest fell hurriedly back, and at that one of the feet moved like lightning. A huge black paw with suddenly out-thrust claws smacked down. And when it slowly slid back, 20 of our men and women were no more than smears on the ground.

We were paralyzed, all of us except Iss, who forgetful of his own instructions about personal safety, was running toward the creature. As we waited the great paw rose, hovered and struck at us again. Eleven fell to that second murderous blow.

Then I saw Iss. He was standing between the paws. His fire-rod was in his hands, and he was looking up at the monstrous head above him. As I watched he lifted the weapon and aimed. Such folly against that huge thing, such heroic folly! Yet Iss was wiser than I. Suddenly the head jerked, a tremor shook the limbs, and without a sound the monster dropped where it stood.

And Iss .? Well, there died a very brave man.

Sunss took charge.

We must find a place of safety, he decided, as soon as possible in case more of such monsters were lurking about. Once we had that we could start to remove our instruments and equipment from the Globe and consider our next step. Accordingly, he

led us forward down the broad way between two of the crevasses.

After traveling about half a mile we reached the foot of a great perpendicular cliff with curious rectangular formations on the face. At the base we found this cavern which seems to run a great distance both ways and though its depth is irregular, its height is strangely constant at some two feet above our heads.

Here we have a refuge from such monsters as that which Iss killed. It is too narrow for those huge paws and even the great claws could only rake a little way inside.

A TERRIBLE thing has happened.

We are still in the cavern. Sunss and a party of twenty went off to find if there were another way out other than that on to the plain where our Globe lay.

Lay! Past tense—there is our calamity.

After he had gone the rest of us waited keeping watch. For a long time nothing happened. Evidently and mercifully, the monster was alone. It lay in a great black mound close to our Globe. Then a curious thing took place. More light suddenly poured over the plain. An enormous beam came into view. It descended, hooked itself to the slain monster and dragged it away out of sight. Then there was thunderous noise which shook everything about us and the light dimmed again.

I do not pretend to understand these things, none of us can understand them, our reason reels before what we have seen; I can do no more than keep a faithful record.

Another long period passed without event. We were beginning to worry about what had happened to Sunss and his party for they had been away several hours, when the most disastrous happening of all occurred without

warning.

Again the plain became lighter. The ground beneath us set up a reverberating rumble and shook so violently to a series of shocks that we were hard put to keep our feet. Peering out of the cavern I saw a sight that even now I can scarcely credit. Forms beside which our previous monster was insignificant: living, moving creatures reared upon two legs and standing 16 or, 17 hundred feet high—I know I shall not be believed when I speak of such a thing as an animal almost a third of a mile in height, but, God knows, it is the truth. Little wonder that the whole plain groaned and rumbled and shook under a burden of five such. They bent over our Globe, they put their forelegs to it, and lifted it—yes, actually lifted that ponderous, mighty Globe from the ground. The shaking beneath us became worse as they took its weight and stumbled away on colossal feet.

IT was too much for some of us. A hundred men ran out from our cavern, cursing, weeping and brandishing their firerods, but it was too late and the range was too great for them to do anything effective—besides, what could hope to be effective against colossi such as these?

Our Globe and all its precious contents has gone. We have nothing now, nothing with which to start building our new world, save our own trifling possessions .

Nor was that the only calamity. A few minutes later two of Sunss's companions came back with a dreadful tale to tell. Behind our cavern they had found a warren of broad tunnels foul with the smell of unknown creatures. They had made their way down them with difficulty. Several times they had been beset by different varieties of six legged creatures of horrible appearance.

Many of these were larger than themselves fearfully armed with spines and claws, and filled with a vicious ferocity which caused them to attack on sight.

Terrifying though they appeared it soon became clear that they were only really dangerous when they made unexpected attacks. Once they had been seen the fire-rods made short work of them.

After a number of fights Sunss had succeeded in reaching open country beyond the tunnels without loss of a man. It was when they were on the way back to fetch us that catastrophe had overtaken them. They had been attacked by fierce, grey-furred creatures 50 feet long and more which they took to be the builders of the tunnels. It was a terrible fight in which most of the party perished before the huge brutes were overcome. Sunss himself had fallen and of all his men only these two had been in a fit condition to make the rest of the journey.

It is a terrible, ghastly tragedy.

Now we have chosen Muin as our leader. He has decided that we must go forward. The plain behind us is barren, our *Globe* is gone, if we stay here we starve, so we must go through the tunnels to the open country beyond, trusting that there are no more grey monsters to attack us on the way.

And God grant that beyond the tunnels this nightmare world gives place to sanity.

Is it so much that we ask—to live, to work, to build, in peace?

* * *

"I'VE been wanting to ask you all evening," said Sally, as she and Graham left the Post that night, "only I thought it better not to in front of the rest. What's happened about Daddy's 'meteorite'? What was it really?"

Graham chuckled.

"That's just what they'd like to know. It's got them absolutely guessing—only that's all very *sub rosa* and confidential. When they got it away and examined it, it appeared to be a solid lump of metal without any joins. In one place there was a hole about half an inch in diameter which appeared to go straight in to about halfway through the thing. Well, they scratched their heads about the best way to tackle it and decided that the only thing to do short of blasting it to bits was to cut it in half. So they rigged up a kind of automatic sawing device, set it going, and bunked in a funk hole—just in case. And now they're even more puzzled than before."

"Why, what happened?"

"Nothing. When they went back, there was the ball in neat halves. The metal casing was about six inches thick, then there was a two or three inch layer of soft fine dust in which were bits of metal and other substances of all shapes—there's some mystery there, incidentally, about which the man who told me was very close—then inside another metal wall was an odd formation of cells for all the world, he said, like a section of honeycomb, only it was made of some rubbery, flexible material instead of wax, and every cell was empty. Finally, there was a hollow space about 5 or 6 inches in diameter in the middle.

"There's the secret weapon—and if you can make anything of that, you're cleverer than they are. Even the dust in it wasn't explosive. So they're all asking one another what, if anything, it could even remotely be expected to do."

"Oh, dear," said Sally, "that'll annoy Daddy. He was so sure it was a meteorite. I wish it had been. It's not a nice thought that people are continually devising newer and more mysterious weapons which we may come on un-

expectedly at any time. It's such waste. There's such a terrible lot of waste in the world."

She tilted back her head, looking up at the starry sky.

"I wish we could be out there."

"You said that last night," he reminded her.

"I know. But I still wish I could."

She turned her head and glanced sidelong at him. "You're thinking it's escapism or defeatism or something. Well, perhaps it is in a way, but it depends on the angle you see it from. I think lots of the early American colonists must have felt like that: they left Europe not because they were afraid but because they were full of hope. They were going to build a new world—but the old one caught them up.

"But think how grand it would be to go out, perhaps near that bright star there, to take all the best with us and leave all the worst behind. Think of setting out in a huge ship, all the people who really hate war and dirt and cruelty and oppression, of landing on a new planet. We'd get rid of all those things that tie us and keep us wandering round and round in the same old boggy mess. We'd start fresh and clean and then what a lovely, lovely world we would build."

Graham put up a hand to push back her hood. He turned her face toward him. It was pale in the faint light, her fair hair was silvery, her eyes lost in dark shadows.

"Oh, my sweet, must you always cry for the stars? There are some lovely things here too, you know."

A BEAM of notable brilliance swivelled and switched erratically beside the Fontain's house.

Graham and Sally walked a little more quickly.

"You'll excuse me mentioning it, my

dear, but your father is rapidly becoming a national menace as well as a local problem. He can't be looking for *another* meteorite."

"He isn't," said Sally, "this time it's the dog. Listen."

A voice was cajoling. "Litty! Litty! Litty!" and interspersing it with whistles.

"Thoroughly improper behavior," Graham said, "illuminating the whole countryside—especially to find a dog with a name like Litty."

"Short for Litvinor. He's such a tactful dog."

The calling was suddenly interrupted by a burst of frenzied barking diminishing quickly into whining yelps.

By the time they reached the house all was quiet and the light had disappeared round the far side.

"You've found him? What's happened?" called Sally, from the yard entrance.

Mr. Fontain was over by the shed, bending down and playing his light on the ground.

"Yes, my dear. I—I'm afraid something's happened to him."

"You don't mean he's dead?" She hurried forward.

"I'm afraid I do, dear."

"Oh, poor Litty," she said, going down on her knees beside the dog's body. "I wonder what . . . ?" she broke off with a sudden cry and jumped.

"Oh, something's stung me. Oh, it hurts." She clutched at her leg, with tears of anguish suddenly starting to her eyes.

"What on earth . . . ?" began her father. He switched his light on to the ground. "What are those things there, ants?"

Graham bent down.

"No they're not ants. I don't know what they are."

He picked one of the little things up

and set it on the palm of his glove to look at it more closely.

"Never seen anything like that before," he said.

Mr. Fontain came closer and looked, too.

It was a queer little creature no more than a quarter of an inch long. Its body seemed to be an almost perfect hemisphere with the flat side below and the round, top surface as shiny as a ladybird's wing cases, colored pink. It was insect-like save that it stood on only four short legs. There was, moreover, no clearly defined head, just two eyes set in the edge of the shiny dome. As they watched, it reared up on two of its legs showing a pale, flat underside with a mouth set just below the eyes. In its forelegs it seemed to be holding a bit of grass or thin wire.

Graham suddenly felt a searing pain in his hand.

"Hell and damnation," he said, shaking it off, "the little brute certainly *can* sting. Look, there's a hole in my glove.

*Your editors consider this the most significant story we have published, concerning space travel, and visitants from other worlds. Life on other planets is bound to be vastly different from life on our own world, and the chances of either one of the two forms of life recognizing the intelligence of the other is extremely remote indeed. There is

Feels as if there's one in my hand as well. I don't know what kind of bugs they are, but they're certainly not things to have around. Got a spray?"

"In the scullery there," said Mr. Fontain, and turned his attention to his daughter.

"Better?" he inquired.

"Hurts like hell," she said, between her teeth.

"Just hang on a minute till we've settled this, then we'll have a look at it."

Graham hurried back with the spray in his hand.

"Put the light over here," he said.

The beam revealed several hundred of the little pink objects crawling toward the wall of the shed. Graham pumped clouds of insecticide vapor over them and watched while they slowed, waved feeble legs, and then lay still. He sprayed a little more around the neighborhood for luck.

"That's about finished them," he said. "Nasty vicious little brutes, weren't they?"*

much satire also, in this story by an English author.

Written during the war in England, the story shows a decidedly pessimistic attitude in the subject matter selected, but in the cheery way in which it is written, would tend to show that the English are far from pessimistic.—Ed.

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The LOST COLONY

—a strange civilization in the heart of the Superstition Mountains

by JAMES NORMAN

The maps showed a lake, but this was no lake—it was a bit of hell on Earth, and Temple landed right in the middle of it!

THE tiny Arizona flying field had been carefully swept by a hundred brooms and the volunteer field-hands stood back, watching the trim fuselage of the Douglas cabin ship shudder behind the gunned motor.

Jack Temple, the lanky young pilot, shoved back his cockpit window, waving at the men below him. "Okay," he yelled. "Clear away!"

Suddenly a paunchy little man pushed his way through the crowd. "Jack!" he yelled. "Listen Jack. Be careful for God's sake! When you get over the Superstitions, skirt Phoenix. For God's sake don't land there or fly over the city. Head directly for the San Joachim oil fields. And keep your radio buzzing. So long!"

Temple's eyes twinkled without smiling. His lips were set as tight as fiddle strings. He gunned the plane motor and the ship gave a sudden surge. The little man below was almost bowled over by the roaring wind from the propeller wash.

A moment later the plane raced across the field in a storm of dust. The tall flipped up, nose rode level, then the wings took air and daylight showed

between the earth and wheels.

The plane circled, gaining altitude to match the jagged circle of mountains that cut the sky around Globe City. At nine thousand feet, Temple leveled her off and headed westward. His fingers, which had grown rigid on the control stick, relaxed slightly. He jerked a blue handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead.

"Jack," he murmured to himself, "If you keep on riding this stuff, you're going to need insurance. And the companies don't like to pay off on sure death."

His glance swept over his shoulder toward the rows of rubber-lined, anchored boxes in the cabin behind him. *Nitro-glycerin!* The boxes were marked —*Danger! Explosives!*

"An understatement," Temple grinned.

A pint of the touchy stuff could blow up a mountain. A blow from a feather was good enough to set it off. The boxes were a rush assignment. Earlier in the morning a dangerous well-fire had blasted California's San Joachim oil fields wide open. Only nitro-glycerin could stop it. Then a series of mys-



R.
Fugue-

"Look!" said the priest. "This is how we intend to destroy our enemies!"

terious explosions had blown up the two main nitro-dumps at Signal Hill and San Diego.

A rush call was sent to Phoenix. They had no nitro so Jack Temple's plane was chartered to fly down to the Globe City mines, pick up a load and shuttle it back to California.

"And when the Southwest Airlines hired me, they asked for safe pilots," Temple muttered grimly. "But they didn't say how safe the pilots would be."

PASSING over Claypool and Miami, he climbed his plane to ten thousand feet and crossed the first ridges of the Superstition Mountains. An endless expanse of rugged, foreboding peaks swung below the wings of his plane.

Temple's fingers tightened again on his control stick, his eyes sharply accounting his instruments. The Superstition Mountains were dangerous. They shot up tricky air currents and there was no place to land with or without nitro. Many people had disappeared in those mountains and even the Zuni Indians shunned it as an abode of evil spirits.

Then something strange happened. Temple whistled in sharp surprise, looked twice at the familiar valley his plane droned over, then scanned his map. "My God!" he gasped. "It ain't there!"

He wiped his brow again. Two years ago he had passed over that same valley and there had been a lake there. Volcano Lake. Now it was dry as a bone!

Suddenly his plane pitched wildly, heaved upward by violent, concussive blasts of air. "What the devil now," he grunted. Then he gaped incredulously at the mountain below him. The whole mountain seemed to shudder,

then blew up in a thousand bits of rock, dust, and orange flame.

Jagged bits of stone whistled a thousand feet skyward, cutting through the wings of the plane like shrapnel. The plane rocked left and right and zoomed into a spin, completely out of control.

While fighting the joystick and notching up the revs, Temple gritted his teeth. "Gees, did I do that," he grunted. Half expecting that one of the nitro boxes had broken from its mooring and slipped through the floor chute, he glanced back into the cabin. No! All the boxes were there. Funny!

Sweat oozed from his pores when he finally got the plane out of the spin and the motor began to miss. "As if nitro weren't bad enough trouble," he groaned. "I can't dump it and I've got to land. I've got to keep the stuff whole or it'll mean my job."

His eye sorted out an apparently level spot in the valley below. Then he switched on his radio. "Hello, Phoenix," he called hoarsely. "Temple calling Phoenix. Southwest Airlines. . . ."

Furiously he jammed the microphone back on its instrument panel hook. The radio didn't work. He glanced at the altimeter. Eight hundred feet now. He couldn't dump the nitro in time. He'd have to land with that load of hell.

THE motor gave its final, choking cough and a spine chilling wind whistled past the fuselage as the plane went into a long glide toward the small field. Temple's fingers gripped the controls so tightly the bones beneath his knuckles showed white. He nursed the plane, with its lethal cargo, twenty feet, ten feet, five feet, and then—a smooth, three point landing.

Braking the ship before it rolled to the sheer mountain barrier surround-

ing the valley, he slumped back in his seat a moment. "Good Lord, I'm still alive," he sighed. Then remembering what had happened, he gazed at the surrounding mountains. "What the devil blew that mountain up?" he asked.

He jiggled with the radio again but it was still dead. Then, gingerly, he stepped past the nitro boxes in the cabin and eased himself out the door. It was at that moment his senses warned him. There was something peculiar about the valley; something that made his flesh creep over his bones.

The valley floor seemed half filled with a blue haze, a volcanic vapor that had partially drifted away. It had gathered in crevices on the mountain sides and in some places looked like water.

"Volcanic stuff," Temple grunted. "Maybe there was a lot of it in here before. That's why we thought there was a lake down here before."

He went about, sniffing. Strangely, there was no odor from what little of the blue haze remained in the valley.

Then, suddenly he came to an abrupt halt. His mouth sagged, aghast, then clamped shut. He blinked ahead at the amazing groups of pyramid shaped buildings that shone in the sun at the far end of the valley.

"A mirage—or maybe that nitro did blow me up and I ain't here the way I think I am," he muttered. "But dammit, that looks too solid for a mirage. I'm going to see."

He stepped back to the plane, took a revolver and holster from the cabin, buckled the belt around his waist and eased the gun in its saddle. Then he set out toward the pyramid buildings.

THE lower terraces of the pyramid city were deserted as he made his cautious entry. It was a strange place

with an eerie atmosphere. Temple knew enough about architecture in the Southwest to realize that this wasn't a pueblo city. It was completely foreign to anything he had ever seen.

He turned down a dark passage that led to a large oval chamber. Approaching the chamber door, he suddenly stopped. His hand dropped automatically to the butt of his pistol and his jaw relaxed as if he had been slapped in the face. He stared ahead in astonishment.

Through a slit in the ceiling, a shaft of sunlight stabbed into the dark room, lighting a strange, yellow robed priest.

"Good Lord!" Temple gasped. "Sun worshipers."

His amazed eyes were fascinated by the white skinned priest who was a good eight feet tall. Resplendent in his flame-like robe, the priest held a golden bowl to the shaft of sunlight. The bowl flashed a dazzling light, gathered the rays of sun within its concave hollow, and set smoldering a piece of tinder held there.

A murmur that was half awe and half prayer swelled from the shadowy corners of the chamber. Jack Temple's muscles tensed, his sharp eyes probed the darkness and he let out a second low whistle. *A hundred white men, all as gigantic in frame as the priest, were kneeling before the altar.*

Temple slowly backed away, moving on cat-like feet. "They aren't Zuñis," he muttered. "They're so damn big they look like they walked right out of a fairy tale. I can't afford to get mixed up in any ritual. Better get my plane out, then come back with a couple of pals after the nitro is safe and sound."

Just as he had cleared the passageway, his foot slipped upon a pebble. He went down face first, his gun clattering across the stone floor, making

thunderous noise, it seemed.

"Clumsy ox!" he swore to himself.

Instantly, the passage and doorway filled with clamoring voices. Temple leaped to his feet and found himself surrounded by a circle of giant men with drawn knives. They were talking in a language that had absolutely no resemblance to anything he had ever heard.

He reached for his gun but one of the giants stepped on it. The knives hedged in closer.

"Say, what the devil is this?" Temple stormed. "What are you doing down here in the Superstitions, and who are you?"

The white giants looked at each other in surprise as he spoke. They began talking again in their unintelligible language. Then two of them took his arms and pulled him back toward the passageway.

"Wait a minute," yelled Temple. "I ain't going nowhere. I've got a job to deliver. Come on, answer my questions."

The men jerked him again.

Suddenly, Temple pulled himself loose. Knowing it was futile to face such overwhelming odds, he feinted toward one, bowled another over in a sudden rush, and using his best football tactics, lunged toward the opening he had made.

Taken by surprise, the strange men hesitated, giving him just that split second he needed to break free. In another instant, he was running a dozen yards ahead of them and holding the distance.

"If I only get to that plane," he gasped as his feet pounded down the last few steps of the city, "I'll toss a can of nitro at them."

He raced now with every bit of energy his body contained. His lungs burned, gasping to drag in the rarefied

mountain air. He could hear them coming from behind. They were gaining, yet he didn't dare waste a second to glance over his shoulder.

Then, suddenly, something struck him in the back of the head. He stumbled forward a few paces, his head whirling in semi-darkness. The walls of the valley seemed to gyrate around his head in a mad tangle.

WHEN Jack Temple again opened his eyes he had lost all sense of time. Although his head ached tremendously, he succeeded in focusing his gaze upon the large airy room in which he rested.

The sun was still shining in. Perhaps he had only been unconscious a few minutes — perhaps this was another day. He groaned at the thought of the people in California waiting for their shipment of nitro. They'd never believe him if he tried to tell them about giant white men in the Superstition Mountains.

"There I go, half cocked," he muttered grimly. "Who says I'm going to get away from here."

Although his feet had not been bound, his hands were tightly pinioned behind his back. He began desperately working at the bonds but with little success. Then he searched the chamber for something that he might use to saw the cords.

At a large table in the center of the room he suddenly paused, staring curiously at the strange charts spread upon the surface.

"Good Lord," he gasped. "Talk about dictators remaking countries! Here's somebody who's got continents on his brain."

His eyes roved over the unfamiliar charts. In one, a good part of the Pacific ocean was filled by three linked continents that extended from forty de-

grees latitude south to thirty degrees north—the whole of the Pacific from Australia to Hawaii. Cities dotted the strange continents. Other cities dotted the coast of California and South America. But they weren't in the locations of such centers as Los Angeles, San Diego and Panama.

"You have interest in the charts?"

Temple whirled like a top, facing the tall, red robed priest he had seen earlier. The priest's cheeks were deeply ridged. His eyes flashed intelligence, plus a certain ruthless element always to be found in a natural leader.

"You're talking English?" Temple gasped.

"Yes, I talk the language of the enemy," the priest stated. "But there are many words that I do not yet understand. I am Villac Umu, priest of this outpost of the Mother Country Mu."

"Mu?" Temple asked curiously.

"Mu!" Villac Umu replied, pointing his finger at the three-link continent upon the chart.

A curious sensation of half-belief, half bewilderment, ran through the fringes of Temple's memory. Some latent spark caught his imagination.

"My Lord, man!" he gulped. "Mu! . . . The Lemurians. Impossible. There's never been any proof that the continents of Mu existed. You're not trying to tell me you people are Lemurians? Why that ocean out there is as empty as my stomach at the moment."

The priest's face clouded.

"We are not Mu," he said. "We are an outpost of the Lemurian colony." The priest indicated the map again, showing the extensive Lemurian colonies in the area that was California, then pointing to the Superstition Mountains, saying, "We . . . outpost!"

TEMPLE felt his head whirl dizzily. He stared incredulously at the map,

then at Villac Umu. "Hell, that's no colony," he said. "That's California."

"They are the enemy," replied the priest darkly. "They have overpowered our coastal colonies and we cannot return to Lemuria until this strange enemy is vanquished."

"Get back to Lemuria?" Temple said. "Either you or I are wacky, mostly you. The continent of Mu was supposed to have slid under the Pacific during an earthquake—that was 12,000 years ago."

The priest now looked puzzled.

"I left Lemuria four years ago," he said. "Eight seasons ago there was a great earthquake. It caused volcanic gas to fill our valley and put us to sleep for a few moons perhaps. But when the blue gas disappeared we awakened and now for two years we have prepared to destroy the enemy to our west. Then we can return to Lemuria which is also called Mu."

"Two years volcanic gas!" Temple gasped. For a moment he leaned against the table, hardly able to control himself. His mind raced madly fitting together facts that looked like sheer impossibility. Could he believe it? It seemed utterly mad to imagine that!

Was this mysterious race of white giants lost in Superstition Mountains really an outpost of the sunken continent of Mu? Had they slept thousands of years, remaining in perfect preservation within a cloak of blue volcanic gas which American cartographers had imagined was a valley lake?

The proof was there! It was there in the stern figure of Villac Umu the priest!

Jack Temple forgot his ordinary, easy going ways. He forgot that he was just a transport pilot. He was now facing history, a strange, eerie twist in the world's history.

Little beads of sweat hung on his brow as he forced himself to be calm. He paced up and down the chamber, his wrists chaffing at the cords that bound them.

"Lemurians!" he muttered in an awed voice. "My God! Twelve thousand years! And they don't know that twelve thousand years have passed; that their race has disappeared; that they've slept all this time No! It can't be . . ."

He suddenly turned toward the priest. "Say, if you're a Lemurian, how'd you learn English? And how do you know there are strange people in the California belt?"

Villac Umu flashed him an excited look. "Come," he ordered. In less than a moment he had led the way into another chamber. It was darker. Temple hesitated, accustoming his eyes to the changed light.

The new room was filled with an assortment of weird technical apparatus, none which seemed at all familiar to Temple. The walls were covered with great charts. Those at least, he recognized. They showed the stratifications under the West Coast mountains—the cavernous oil domes and gas deposits beneath the surface.

The priest twisted a copper knob and suddenly a metal sheath upon a narrow table slid back, revealing a luminous, convex crystal. An eerie light glowed within the crystal and unexpected, static-like sounds flooded through the room.

JACK TEMPLE stared into the thing, his mouth opening in astonishment. "Television!" he gasped. "And without electrical power!"

A view of one of California's highways with autos racing along it was framed in the crystal. And the clear sound of the auto horns and singing

tires could be heard.

"So I learned your language," said the priest.

An idea formed in Temple's mind. "Why don't you turn that apparatus so you can look eastward?" he demanded.

The priest shook his head mysteriously. "It will not work in the direction of the other three winds," he explained. "We can only look in the direction of the mother continent, Lemuria which is Mu."

"Then you don't know about places like New York or that America's other civilization is behind you?" said Temple. "You're missing something."

"Lemuria is the only civilization," the priest answered coldly. "Tomorrow we destroy the enemy who has overpowered our costal colonies."

"Destroy California?" Temple began to laugh.

Anger mounted within the Lemurian priest and his eyes flashed at Temple.

"We have begun," he said. "Already our plans are prepared. The science of Lemuria is great. We have knowledge of the gas deposits beneath the coast. We can detonate the whole area at once, as we did to a small area of it this morning."

"You did that?" Temple gasped. "You blasted the oil fields?"

The question was unnecessary. One look at the grin scientist-priest's face convinced him that the Lemurians did indeed have some strange ray machine capable of detonating the gas and oil deposits beneath the earth.

Temple thought quickly. The priest was off guard at the moment. He'd never expect a man with his hands tied behind him to make trouble. The Lemurians were probably holding him until they blew up the coastal area like a gigantic earthquake so that the sea would rush in as far as the Rockies.

Suddenly he walked toward the un-

suspecting giant. When almost facing him, Temple brought up his knee sharply, jamming it with sudden force into the Lemurian's midriff. The big man bent double, gasping in agony for wind. Abruptly, in perfect timing, Temple cracked his other knee upward, banging the priest's jaw as he bent forward.

A grunt of pain echoed in the room as the priest doubled up and crumpled to the floor, unconscious. Instantaneously, Temple leaped to his side, and after some difficulty secured the priest's long bladed knife. It was but a moment's work to slit the cords holding his wrists.

"Now, to bust up their ray machine," he muttered grimly as he shoved the knife in his belt.

FRANTICALLY, he searched among the various, strange bits of apparatus in the chamber for something that he might identify as a ray machine. A sinking sensation filled him for if that machine was in the room he couldn't recognize it. And it would take him an hour to wreck all the apparatus there.

He might risk being found, when smashing the machinery, and then discover that it had been hidden in some other place.

"I'll have to get out of here," he decided finally. "If I can get away fast enough, maybe I can warn the army post at Phoenix in time for them to send a parachute squad down here with tommy-guns before the fireworks start."

He slipped off his shoes, gripped the priest's knife firmly and stepped into the corridor leading from the building he had been held in. Without shoes, he moved with pantherish silence, dodging from one doorway to another, keeping out of sight as much as possible.

Then he stopped suddenly, his eyes fastened upon a tall guard who stood at

the gateway to the valley.

Measuring the distance between himself and the Lemurian, he knew he couldn't take the man by surprise. But there were other tactics. Tossing pebbles against a building on the opposite side of the Lemurian, he guided the man's attention until he could crawl up behind him.

Gritting his teeth, praying fervently, he crawled along the opposite wall until he was opposite the unwary Lemurian. He hugged the shadows. One false move, a single slip would bring the man around with a challenging cry.

He didn't even dare slip the knife in the guard's back, for a choking gasp would give alarm to the entire pyramid city.

In another second he had passed the giant. Twenty feet more and he dodged behind the cover of the city wall. Taking in a deep breath of relief, he ran across the flat valley toward the stalled Douglas.

He had one chance in a thousand to get away before the Lemurians discovered he was missing. That chance was to find the conk in his plane motor. Without pausing for breath, he uncowed the engine and feverishly examined the wiring.

"If anything is broken, it's there," he muttered. "Yeah, here it is!"

A thrill of victory surged through his body as his fingers rewired the faulty spark. It was but a second's work. He'd be off the ground in another moment.

He slammed the metal cowling shut, snapped the safety bolt, then ran around to the cabin.

Suddenly he stopped! A weird cry came across the valley, reverberating against the mountain walls. It sent an electric chill tingling down his spine. A dozen Lemurians raced across the sand toward the plane.

THE sight of the giant men rapidly approaching, spurred Temple to action.

He clambered into the plane. His fingers hastily cut in the switch and compression starter. The abrupt roar of the motor was music in his ears.

The motor gunned to a thunderous roar. The tail elevators depressed as the plane taxied a half circle to get the full run of the field. Then abruptly, Temple eased the joystick back and sent the plane roaring toward the Lemurians. Ten yards, five yards—the giant men dropped to the ground in confusion.

A grim smile flickered in the corners of Temple's taut mouth. His eyes swept from his dials to the wall of mountain directly ahead.

"I'm gonna make it! I've gotta make it!" he repeated grimly.

The sweat broke upon his forehead again as he jockeyed his ship over the dangerous peaks and sent her into a difficult, spiral climb. "Something tells me I've got to do something quick," he thought as the plane sailed above the valley. "Calling the army isn't gonna help. That Lemurian ray machine might not wait . . ."

Suddenly he snapped his fingers. "My God!" he gasped. "The nitro!"

Hastily, he set the automatic pilot and climbed back into the cabin and set about slashing the leather moorings that held the nitro-glycerin cases. It was ticklish work. The slightest bump . . . and blooey!

Again he re-set the automatic pilot, directing the plane's course exactly over the valley. With utmost care he gingerly eased one of the cases into the floor chute. He let go.

The nitro package plummeted earthward. A moment later a second case, third, and then the last case shot through the floor of the plane.

INSTANTANEOUSLY, Temple leaped into the pilot seat, grabbing the control stick with both hands and jamming his heels against the rudder controls. A tremendous roar came from below. The plane shot skyward, buffeted and wracked by an upward blast of wind.

In the valley below all hell broke loose. Livid flame spurted across the valley in four successive blasts. The mountains seemed to crack wide open, spewing their boulders into the sky, sending gigantic walls of rock caving upon the valley, throwing up tons of swirling, wind blasted dust.

The entire crest of a mountain slid into the valley, engulfing and smashing the pyramid city of the Lemurians as if it were a toy stage setting in Hollywood.

Smaller rocks *zzinnged* past Temple's plane as if they were shot from an anti-aircraft cannon. The plane bucked like a wild mustang.

Gradually, the Douglas was brought under control and Temple was able to relax in his seat. "Boy, I did that just like a regular professional volcano," he sighed. "Better get in touch with Phoenix so they won't get worried about a load of nitro wandering through the Southwest."

He switched on his radio. It was working again. He picked up the hand microphone. "Jack Temple calling Phoenix . . . Temple calling Southwest Airlines . . ." he called into the mic.

"Phoenix Airport," a voice answered in the earphones. "Okay, come in, Temple. What's happened?"

"Got lost," Temple replied drily.

"There's an order here for you, Temple," the airport radio flashed. "Return to Globe City with the nitro. It's no longer needed in California. The explosion that blew up the Signal Hill nitro dump put out the oil well fires at

the same time. The news just came through."

"What!" Temple shouted.

"Return to Globe City, Temple," the voice repeated.

Temple hooked up his microphone with a sad shake of his head. Sure! Go back home! That was easy. But how was he going to explain the loss of his cargo of nitro glycerin? Who the devil would believe him if he said that

he had dumped it on a valley full of Lemurian giants?

He had visions of being docked more than a couple of months in pay because of that nitro. He shrugged his shoulders half heartedly as he swung the plane's nose back toward Globe City. "Well, so what, Jackie?" he laughed drily. "You had a lot of fun while it lasted and you'll probably have a couple of nightmares remembering it."

THE MAN WHO LIVED NEXT WEEK

(Concluded from page 67)

With calm resolution, Mr. Piff raised the sledgehammer over his toothpick shoulders and let it ride. The Future-scope disintegrated into smithereens. Then Mr. Piff dropped the sledge and trod resolutely up the stairs to the kitchen.

Matilda stood over the hot stove with a potato masher. She looked angry and flushed. As her husband's small feet stepped lightly into the room, she turned to face him.

"What," demanded Matilda, "have you been up to, you miniature worm? What have you got down in that cellar—some gadget you stole from the kids next door?"

Mr. Piff gulped involuntarily. Matilda had come too close to home for comfort. Standing here in the center of the room, he drew back his pigeon-breasted shoulders.

"Matilda," he began bravely, trying to remember his lines, "your attitude for the past—er—thirty-one years has not been properly respectful. From now on—"

"Ye Gods!" Matilda shrieked. "The man is crazy! I'd better put him out of his misery before he throws a fit!"

And with a wild swing Mr. Piff's spouse flung out the potato masher and beamed Mr. Piff square on the noggin. .

An hour later: "Percival," Matilda shrieked from the kitchen, "come to supper! If you don't come this instant, I'll jam some castor oil down your throat!"

Mr. Piff shuddered. He removed the icebag from his swollen pate and got up groggily from his bed.

"Yes, my dear," he called back meekly. "I'm coming."

« « ODDITIES OF SCIENCE FICTION » »

ONE of the most amazing oddities of science fiction is a 120,000 word novel written by no less than eighteen famous science fiction writers in collaboration. It was written for, and donated to, a little amateur magazine called *Fantasy Magazine* back in 1932. Each of the eighteen authors wrote a chapter, and each one did some of the best work of their lives—without thought of remuneration.

And if you think the story, which was titled "Cosmos," wasn't a good one, maybe a list of the authors who contributed will convince you. Ralph Milne Farley wrote the first chapter, and was fol-

lowed by David H. Keller, M.D.; Arthur J. Burks; Bob Olsen; Francis Flagg; John W. Campbell, Jr.; Rae Winters; Otis Adelbert Kline; E. Hoffman Price; Abner J. Gelula; Raymond A. Palmer; A. Merritt; J. Harvey Haggard; Edward E. Smith, Ph.D.; P. Schuyler Miller; L. A. Eshbach; Eando Binder; and lastly, Edmond Hamilton.

Many fans have admired the only autographed copy of this amazing book in existence. You, too, can see it—if you ever visit the offices of the editors of *AMAZING STORIES*.

Mystery of the Amazing

by DONALD BERN

***When a man is missing, and you suspect
he's been murdered, you wouldn't think
of looking for him in a storage battery***

"JUMP off while she's rolling," said Ivan Sakanoff as I swung open the door of his jalopy, "cause if I stop her she won't want to go again!"

"You're telling *me* that!" I grunted bitterly, jamming my Algebra One under my right arm. Ivan's dark face smirked.

The ride from school had jarred every bit of bone in my loose body and twice I had been forced to get out and push. The only thing that worked with some efficiency on Sakanoff's four wheeled mechanical horror was the ashtray.

Gingerly, I climbed out on the running board, muttering sourly:

"Well, thanks for the lift, Ivan. It was a displeasure."

"Don't mention it, don't mention it, Wilbury," Ivan called airily as I hopped from the mobile tin can. And then as I turned toward my home his marvel of mechanical degeneracy shuddered along out of my sight.

Father met me in the yard. His mild gray eyes were all lit up, his white hair was a tangled mess and he was all a-twister.

"Horace," he chortled gleefully, "at last I've done it—disintegration of matter into positive and negative electricity—then integration of electric charges

back to its previous matter state!"

What can you do with an old man who throws things like that at you? I plodded past him into the house, threw my Algebra One in a corner and sank onto a couch. Father exclaimed:

"Well, what do you think of it?"

I mumbled: "Positively, without a doubt. Now let me take a nap."

"Yes, isn't it!" he chuckled. "My greatest achievement! Come along, Horace, I'll show you how it works."

I rose to my feet disgustedly and followed him down to his basement laboratory. Finally, his pleasantly plump figure stopped before the most bugousiest contraption I've ever had the misfortune to lay eyes upon. It wasn't an ice box and it wasn't a radio. It might have been a combination of the two with a few odd parts stuck on to add confusion to the confusion. An auto battery was hooked up.

"This," father said proudly, coming to a halt, "is it!"

"Now, really!" I whispered.

"Yep," he chirped, "this is it."

And then before my disinterested eyes he started to wire together some of the more scattered parts of this weird mechanism.

I closed my eyes, finally, and tried to sleep on my feet. Sometimes I can do that.

Battery . . .

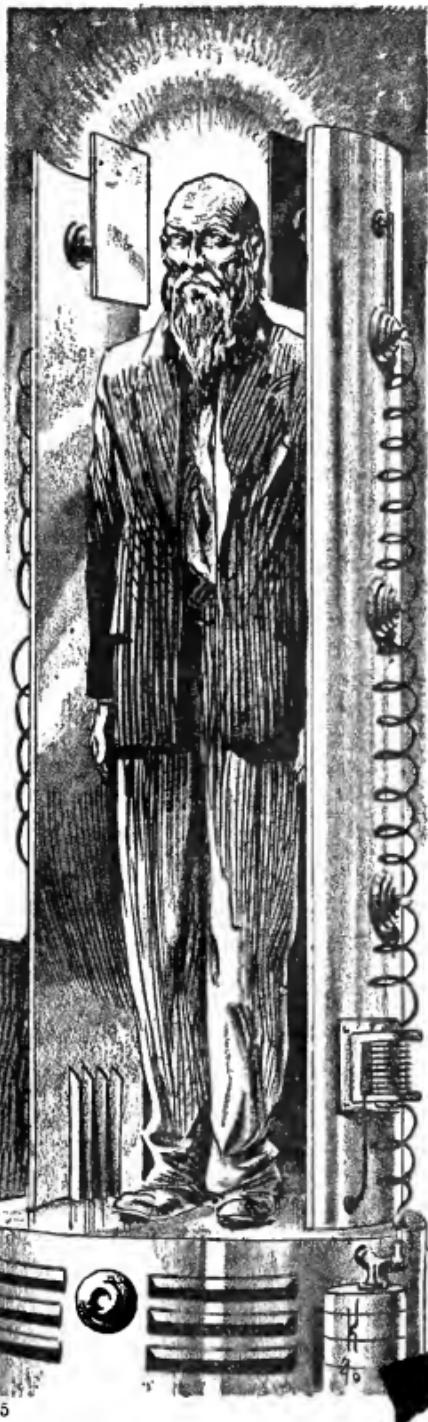
"Now watch," father muttered, and by force of will I started my orbs working again. "When I pull this switch the matter disintegrator commences to function," he went on. "For one thousandth of a second a negative stream of electricity draws all the positive elements from the subject and relays it to the storage battery. Then for the same time a positive flows draws the negative electric matter, storing it in the battery. By reversing the current the original matter tends to reappear. Understand?"

"There's a ball game in an hour, father, I wonder."

Father held up a broken old cup, dangled it before me as though it was a rare piece of china. He assumed a classroom pose.

"This will be our subject. Now note—I place it on a non-conductive platform between these two plates, positive and negative. Both are wired to the disintegrator and to the automobile bat-

"Just one second,
Sakenoff, and I'll
demonstrate my
new invention."



tery. Now I pull the switch, and—presto. Look!"

The cup was gone.

"Note—the cup has been disintegrated to its electrical charges."

I rubbed my hairless jaw lazily, then murmured:

"Well, what d'ya know! Where is it now?"

"In the battery, son," father explained patiently.

I FACED him squarely and shook my forefinger in his round, mild face. For a second words failed me, then I burst out:

"Father, you have no right to fool me—even if I am your son! I protest. I resent being made fun of. I rebel. I'm going to the ball game!"

Father nodded thoughtfully, then turned back to his homely device. I started up the basement stairs.

"Note—by pulling this lever I reverse the current and—watch!"

I jerked around just in time to see the broken cup sudden appear on the platform between the two plates! And father couldn't of done it by any sleight-of-hand trick!

"Well, well, well," I commented.

"Simple, eh?" father chuckled. "Now help me carry these things over to Sakanoff's laboratory. I look forward eagerly to seeing his eyes pop out. He's been laughing at me ever since he invented that silly gadget for delivering small articles via radio waves."

Ten minutes later, father and I were setting down the apparatus in old man Sakanoff's garage laboratory.

"Well, Wilbury, what did you invent now—a *breakable* dish?" Sakanoff leered. He was a husky man, dark complexioned with darker eyes and a deep, hoarse voice.

Reathing heavily, father set the stor-battery in place. Finally, he looked

the other in the eye and crowed: "You'd never guess, Sakanoff, you'd never guess! I've proven that matter and electricity are one and the same. Matter is just a mass of negative and positive charges—equally balanced! And what's more, I've discovered how to disintegrate any body of matter and then return it to its previous form!"

Sakanoff sneered—how he could sneer!—with every inch of his body. It showed in the lift of his heavy eyebrows, the narrowing of his eyes, the thinning of his lips, and the posture taken by his burly body.

"I don't believe a word of it, Oscar Wilbury!" he rasped. "You'll have to show me—and plainly! before I believe a single syllable."

If father knew how to glare he would have glared then. But the best he could muster was a sort of vacant, distant stare. He was angry at the abuse: his feelings were hurt. Finally, he choked out:

"Show you? Why, of course! I'll show you—and how I will!"

He turned his back on Ivan's old man and for several seconds pattered wildly with his mental offspring. Sakanoff yawned and scratched himself.

Then father straightened and I saw a very peculiar glint in his eyes. I began to doubt his good intentions.

"All right, Sakanoff," he said pleasantly, "step close. That's right, between the plates . . ."

His intentions were clear. I said, "You shouldn't do that, father, you shouldn't!"

He didn't seem to hear me, or if he had, my words were wasted. Sakanoff stood motionless between the plates, a kind of sarcastic, yet doubtful look on his face. "Well?" he snarled.

Father reached for the switch.

"See you later," I said to Sakanoff, crossing my fingers.

Father turned the switch.

There was a brilliant flash of light, a kind of crackling noise. And then Sakanoff wasn't there anymore!

Father turned to me, a silly grin spreading over his round face.

"Sakanoff's in the battery now," he chuckled.

I WAS getting a headache. A very bad one.

I gasped, "Yeah, I know. In the battery. For heaven's sake, get him out!"

But father shook his head, still grinning.

"There's no hurry. This is my chance to get even with him. Let him stay in the battery a couple of days; there's no danger. And it'll be pleasant not to have his face around for awhile!"

I shrugged my thin shoulders disgustedly. Father and Sakanoff weren't exactly what you'd call friends and if this was father's idea of revenge then let him be happy.

"It's your party," I muttered. "Let's go home."

We left all the apparatus just the way it was. Before leaving the laboratory I took a quick glance at the battery, and shivered. We passed Ivan Sakanoff on the street, his nose stuck in the vitals of his jalopy.

"Hullo," he said.

"Hullo," I answered, thinking about his old man and feeling guilty. I was in the throes of one of those premonition things. I was scared maybe everything wouldn't be all right. I had the funny thought that maybe Sakanoff wouldn't come back out of the battery.

But what did happen was something just as bad. Worse.

A BOUT the middle of next day I was sitting on the porch of our home with father when all of a sudden Sher-

iff Abbott and his blank-faced deputy drove up. Sheriff Abbott had a long face, a long nose, and a long, skinny body. He wasn't much to look at.

With the deputy behind him, he came up to where we sat. He stopped and eyed us sternly for a long minute. Then, real fast, he whipped out:

"What did you do with the body, Wilbury!"

He had hoped to startle us but he failed. Father smiled mildly and said, "What body?"

The sheriff pointed a finger at him. "Sakanoff has disappeared! His son said he saw you leaving Sakanoff's laboratory. Sakanoff hasn't been seen since! Did you kill him, huh?" I thought he ended on a rather hopeful note.

Father chuckled so hard that the little white hairs on the top of his head jitter-bugged. Finally, between giggles he stammered out:

"I didn't kill him. I disintegrated him!"

Sheriff Abbott started. His eyes popped. He gasped, "Oh, an axe-man! You're under arrest!"

His hand disappeared under his coat and came up with a revolver. The scared deputy produced a pair of handcuffs.

"Don't resist!" the sheriff exclaimed.

Father paled at sight of the gun and I thought for a moment that he was going to keel over in a faint. I decided that the fun had gone far enough. I rose to my feet and said:

"Abbott, I can explain everything. Sakanoff's safe. We can produce him in a jiffy. You see, it was all just an experiment . . ."

Just then I decided that it was impossible to go into explanations. The law officer would only think we were crazy. So I said abruptly:

"Sakanoff's in his laboratory." 

go there."

We piled into the sheriff's bus and rattled over to Sakanoff's place. Abbott held on to his gun firmly and drove with one hand. The deputy watched us suspiciously.

Then we crawled out of the car and entered Sakanoff's garage laboratory.

"All right, where's Sakanoff?" the sheriff grunted, looking around.

Father strode over to his unearthly contraption, smiling confidently. He murmured, "In a moment, in a moment . . ."

Then all of a sudden he stopped. His mouth fell open and he stared. "Heavens!" he gasped.

A chill wiggled through me.

"What's the matter?" I gulped.

Father had grown white. He swayed slightly. Then he whispered:

"The battery . . . it's gone!"

True enough, the battery with Sakanoff in it had disappeared.

"Where's Sakanoff?" the sheriff repeated. But father and I could only stand and gaze at one another in a stupor. Sakanoff was in the battery and the battery had vanished!

SLOWLY, father spun on his heel until he faced Abbott. His mouth opened and closed five times before he choked out:

"It isn't here anymore—I mean—he isn't here anymore. Someone took it—him—away! Sakanoff isn't here!"

The sheriff pushed back his fedora and scratched the top of his forehead puzzledly. Evidently he suspected dirty work afoot.

"Oh ho," he said, "first he's here and then he isn't. Confess, Wilbury, it'll go easier with you! What did you do with the body?"

"I don't know where it is," father desperately. "I don't know!"

had an idea father was saying the

wrong thing. He was admitting there was a corpse when there really wasn't any. He was all bawled up and so was I.

"I'm going to lock you two up!" Sheriff Abbott stated grimly. "Everyone knows that you and Sakanoff were enemies, but—murder!"

I held out my hand and the deputy handcuffed father and I together. Oh, the shame of it!

Ten minutes later we were alone in a cell. Father sat on a cot with his small chin resting on the palm of his hand. He was depressed and so was I. By this time the news had spread around town. People gathered around the jailhouse and some tried to peer into the cell window. Whenever I stood to look out someone just on the outside would give me an unpleasant stare.

"D'you think they'll lynch us father?" I asked.

He sighed tiredly. I sat down beside him and watched some roaches play tag across the floor. It was no use explaining to the sheriff about the battery; he didn't have enough imagination. And without the battery we were sunk—and Sakanoff too. He was in the battery.

And it was while I was sitting there, mooning over our horrible situation, that a familiar sound reached my ears. I rose quickly and stuck my nose between the cell window bars just as Ivan Sakanoff in his disgusting vehicle drove up before the jailhouse. Before he could get out the buggy, the dull-faced deputy appeared at his side. They talked together for several seconds and then Ivan rolled away.

I turned from the window with a queer feeling—as though I had witnessed something important but couldn't quite grasp its meaning. Something uncommon had transpired in the moments Ivan and the deputy conversed. I tried to put my finger on it.

What had happened?

Then suddenly I knew! Black suspicion engulfed me, finally turning to certainty. I knew the answer—I knew everything! My right clenched fist whacked against my left hand palm.

FATHER looked up and gazed at me through a mental fog.

"What?" he mumbled.

I said, "Father, I know the answer to it all! But I have to get out of here. I'm going to get out of here!"

"No, no, Horace, it will be admission of guilt to escape . . ."

"Baloney!" I grunted. I was thinking fast, recalling a prison escape scene I'd seen in a movie once. Let's see, first I had to call a guard

I strode to the cell door. I called, "Oh, Abbott!"

In a moment the sheriff came slinking up to the bars.

"Going to confess?" he inquired hopefully.

"Yeah," I said, "I can't stand this anymore. My conscience bothers me. For Pete's sake, gimme a cigarette!"

He came close, holding out a pack. It was an easy matter then to slip my hand through the bars and yank his old revolver from its worn holster. I jabbed the muzzle into his lean middle, a little less gentle than possible.

"Oke, bo!" I snapped. "Unlock this door. I'm making a getaway!"

His long jaw fell open but he did as I ordered. A moment later, the sheriff and his deputy were occupying the same cell with father. Father was in a kind of stupor, gaping at me. He looked awful miserable.

I stuffed the keys in my pocket, waved at father, and walked out of the hoosegow. I had to act fast. I had to get Sakanoff back before the sheriff could lay hands on me again. I had to get hold of that storage battery now

that I knew where it was.

I walked out to the street and into a flock of excited townspeople. I turned away, hiding my face. Then all of a sudden Sheriff Abbott's voice boomed from the jail window:

"Get that Wilbury boy! He's escaping!"

I broke into a run, a pack of shouting men on my heels. But I'm not on the high school track team for nothing. My heels threw up a dust screen and pretty soon I was a couple of blocks ahead. It took me just a few more minutes to reach Sakanoff's place.

Ivan was sitting moodily in his automobile when I pattered up behind him. He looked around and saw me. His mouth fell open. He screeched, "Hellllpuh!"

"I'm not going to hurt you, Ivan," I said, coming up beside him. "Just want to ask you a question. Did you put a new battery in this car yesterday?"

"Uh huh, found it with a pile of stuff in the garage. What did you do to my old man? you murderer!"

"I thought so," I said, "it's all your fault. Get that battery out of the car—and quick!"

He looked puzzled.

"Go ahead. Quick!" I ordered. There wasn't much time. Any minute the gang of men would come stampeding along. I grabbed the battery just as soon as the bolts were loose and lugged it into Sakanoff's laboratory. Father's invention stood intact.

"What the hell you doing?" Ivan questioned.

I wired together some of the weird parts in the manner father had done, clipped some more wires to the battery poles. Then I stood back, turned the switch, pulled the reverse current lever.

And there, standing between the plates was Sakanoff!

(Concluded on page 132)

Chicago Invaded—

BY THE MEN FROM MARS!

ON September 1 and 2, last summer, AMAZING STORIES went to a party; one of the strangest, but at the same time, most interesting parties ever held in the name of science fiction. It was the Second World Science Fiction Convention of 1940.

For one whole year a group of science fiction readers who classify themselves as members of a more-or-less mythical organization called "Fandom" prepared for this event. Their leader was a young fellow named Mark Reinsberg, and Mark spent countless hours building from nothing to provide an event that would attract enough readers of science fiction from all parts of the United States to make it a success.

Thus it was that Chicago was treated—yes treated!—to the most welcome "invasion from Mars" (or from anywhere else for that matter) it had ever experienced. Science fiction fans came from all parts of the country, and even from other countries, to gather together and pledge their loyalty to "fandom."

Nor were they alone in their attendance, for science fiction's big-name authors came too. There was the famous author of the Skylark stories, Edward E. Smith, Ph.D., Ross Rocklynne, who writes perhaps the most original idea stories in science fiction, David Wright O'Brien, talented nephew of the late Farnsworth Wright and brightest new star on AMAZING STORIES' horizon.

There was William P. McGivern, the man who is making humor the newest and most popular phase in fantasy; Don Wilcox, best loved author since his very first story; Robert Moore Williams, who said of the convention: "I don't believe it!"; and A. R. Steber, globe-trotting-champion writer of science fiction.

But to tell the truth, no matter how famed, the writers were no great shucks at this convention. It was of the fans, for the fans, and by the fans. And how they took advantage of their day of glory!

A day of speech-making led the convention off what might have been considered a rather hasty

tic start—until the *piece-de-resistance*, the masque ball, took place on the second night.

Have you ever seen Buck Rogers in the flesh? Have you ever faced Ming the Merciless, face to face? Have you ever seen a Ph.D. fire a ray gun? Have you ever traveled into the future and seen the men and women who are to come?

No, you bet you haven't! But they were at that masque ball. We rubbed elbows with "North-west" Smith, with Flash Gordon, with the Invisible Man. We gazed in admiration at the lovely High Priestess of Foo (a winsome girl who said her name was Pogo), at the girl of the twenty-fourth century (she said her name was Morojo), and in awe at a fellow they said was "Oscar," but who didn't say much—he was also dressed as the invisible man, but obviously his costume hadn't been a complete success, for his bones were "plain to be seen."

But in spite of the hilarity, the real keynote of the science fiction convention was obviously sincerity. They believed in what they were doing, and perhaps they were doing a great deal more

than we can suspect at this early stage. For 15 years some of them have been carrying on the tenets of "fandom," and some of them are gaining influential places in today's world, and what's more important, in tomorrow's world. They are looking forward, not back, and some of the things they see will amaze us when they come true.

They have a sense of power, and of a responsibility that comes with power, these "fans." They might have hit the real, underlying keynote of significance in the opening speech by Mark Reinsberg, in which he spoke of the war that is raging in Europe and Africa, and of the role science fiction had already played in forecasting the weapons already used.

He pointed out that it was certain that many more of the predictions of science fiction, as exemplified by AMAZING STORIES, would come true, and mentioned especially, U-235. What will this mean to the future? Holocaust or Utopia? Atomic power, or atomic destruction? Yes, it's something

(Concluded on page 132)



MARK REINSEBERG



Oscar, Amazing Stories reader from the Literature, Science, and Hobbies Club.
(Photo by Millard)



Left to right: Forrest J. Ackerman; Morojo; Doctor Edward E. Smith, Ph.D.; Pogo; Mark Reinsberg.
(Photo by Millard)



"Get your copy of the program booklet!"
chants Morojo, leading lady fannette.
(Photo by Millard)



Left to right: Ross Rocklynne, fantasy author; Paul
Freehafer; Gertrude Kuslan.
(Photo by Tucker)

Dashing Farry Ackerman and lovely
Pogo put on their
convention smile.
(Photo by Freehafer)



SCIENCE FICTION'S BIGGEST PARTY

YES indeed, it was a big event! All men and women who read science fiction weren't there, but those who were made up for those who didn't come. It was the grandest party put on in many a day, and they came from the four ends of the nation to make science fiction whoopee. They dressed in costumes, they fired ray guns, they all but launched rocket ships from hotel roofs. But through it all, in spite of the fun, ran a vein of seriousness. They were here to enjoy themselves, but they were here, too, for a purpose. And that purpose was the furthering and advancement of something they all believe in with firm fervor and faith—science fiction's prophetic voice, power of imagination, and scope of entertainment.

(Concluded from page 130)

thing to think about. And to find so many of the men and women of this nation holding conventions, and thinking out loud about it is a matter the rest of us should mark well.

But now, the convention is over, and the members of "fandom" are pointing toward 1941 and the Denver convention. It'll be greater than ever, they all declare, with an enthusiasm that is contagious.

We can't doubt that it will be, and we all hope to be there to participate.

Perhaps to the name of Mark Reinsberg we should add that of Bob Tucker, who aided him in the preparations for the invasion of Chicago. In fact, he all but built rocket ships to convey the members to the convention. Maybe they *will* build rocket ships next time!

Another patient worker was Erle Korshak, who also acted as emcee at all the functions of the convention in a brilliant and entertaining manner.

AMAZING STORIES respectfully salutes that mythical organization called "fandom." Long may it exist. We haven't had so much fun since Adam Link was a pile of tin in a sheet metal shop!

BOB TUCKER
A native of Bloomington, Illinois, and one of the charter members of "fandom".

MYSTERY OF THE AMAZING BATTERY (Concluded from page 129)

"POP!" Ivan screamed, blinking his eyes.

Sakanoff lurched forward, a sneer curling his lips. Then he halted confusedly and looked around. He muttered, "Where's Wilbury?"

As quickly as possible I explained to him what had happened.

"You mean to tell me I was in that battery all the time?" he demanded incredulously.

And just then the townsmen broke into the garage. They jarred to a stop and stared at Sakanoff as though he was a ghost. In fact, he did look kind of like one. He looked about thirty pounds less. But I figured that was because Ivan had already run down the battery some.

"We thought you were dead!" they chorused finally.

Then we all straggled back to the jail. When Sheriff Abbott saw Sakanoff, his eyes just about popped out. He quawked, "What's this all about? What's going on?"

I took the keys from my pocket and unlocked the cell door. The sheriff, the

deputy, and father staggered out.

Father grasped my arm. "Where did you find the battery?" he asked. I told him. He scratched the little white curls on the top of his head and his usually smooth brow furrowed.

"How did you know it was in Ivan's automobile?" he queried puzzledly.

"I figured that out when Ivan drove up to the jail, talked with the deputy and then drove away," I explained. "You see, *the motor of his jalopy didn't die while he stood there!* I almost missed it at first, but when he drove away without being pushed I knew he'd done something to make it run so well. I figured he'd put in a new battery, the battery his old man was inside of!"

Sakanoff pushed forward and waved his fist in father's little nose. "Now look at me!" he raged, "I've lost weight. I'm a wreck!"

Father smiled mildly. "Oh, that can be taken care of," he said, "if you wish to be disintegrated once more, we can recharge the battery and bring you back to normal."

"Oh, no you don't!" Sakanoff roared, and stormed off.

The incident was closed, but Sakanoff took to drinking malted milks to gain back his weight.

Meet the Authors

JAMES NORMAN

Author of

LOST COLONY IN THE SUPERSTITIONS

AS for myself, life began at forty—forty miles an hour. I was born in a compartment on a Chicago bound Pennsylvania train. Since then life has not been moving so speedily.

The train dumped me in the Windy City where, eventually, I worked my way through school as a swimming instructor. Thus one thing led to another. Upon coming of age, I stumbled across England. There I took up the duties of trainer for Zimmy the Legless Swimmer who was set on swimming the English Channel. Three unsuccessful attempts and a gale that swept us into the North Sea put an end to that business.

Paris looked very nice so for three months I barked in a sideshow at *Luna Park*. And this is no way to learn French. When the park closed for the winter the Paris office of the Chicago *Tribune* picked me up and as luck would have it, I was around when things started blowing up.

I was on the spot during the 1934 riots in Paris. In Germany, Hindenburg died right under my nose. To get away from it all, I took a vacation in the Italian Alps and the next day Mussolini moved half his troops up there just to keep Hitler out of Austria the day after Vest Pocket Dolfus was shot.

When the *Trib* closed up in Paris the following year I decided to write a book. It was called *A Short History of God—An Obituary*. It received a very unfriendly reception and I decided that literature was not for me.

Then I acquired an interest in a South Sea island, way down in Manga Reva, 900 miles southeast of Tahiti. Just as I was on the verge of Polynesianizing myself a lady came along and said she was my wife. I'll be darned if she wasn't!

An exceedingly violent campaign on her part succeeded in putting Manga Reva in the back of my mind. Just about then, the Spanish war came

along. I argued that since I was a newspaper man, and since I had been in Spain a couple of times, I ought to take a more personal interest in the goings on.

My wife, feeling that she had been rather harsh about the Manga Reva affair, let me have Spain as a sort of consolation prize. So off I went. I wrote a couple of articles, sent them back and then decided I was missing something.

So I fell in with a French anti-aircraft battery and fought on active fronts—Teruel, Aragon and Levant—for nine months. Someone, just because

I knew French, put me in charge of an Oerlikon gun crew (Swiss). Well, we bagged our share of Junkers and one Henschel 123 (the father of Stuka dive-bombers).

But the war caught up with me, as it does with most people. I spent a couple of months in a hospital being treated with aspirins by the dozen and then was offered a job handling the English language division of the Madrid Press Bureau. This was very nice. It looked like the millennium had come—except that we lived on a diet of boiled, raw, baked and fried cabbage through the winter of 1938.

The work was easy, however. We translated American and English news reports into Spanish for the Spanish press. We prepared and broadcasted four half-hour programs in English. If you're a short-wave fan, you probably heard us over Station EAQ.

Then, the following Spring the Spanish world broke up. Spanish fifth-columnists ate their way into Madrid and prepared the scene for Franco. As far as I was concerned, this was not quite healthy. And the American consul in Valencia said that there were a lot of people worried about the same thing—it might be best if I go back to

On the way out, our boat was captured by an Italian cruiser. We were taken to the Islands for a day. I had a feeling that was the end—then the British cruiser, *Devonshire*, with its long guns, saying, "Leave 'em."

(Concluded on page 146)



JAMES NORMAN

Conducting an experiment in the effect of malt and hops on the human system.

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

This department will be conducted each month as a source of information for our readers. Address your letters to Question and Answer Department, AMAZING STORIES, 608 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

Q. Mammoth Cave has always interested me greatly. Has it been completely explored?—William Spitzer, Roanoke, Va.

A. It is hard to say definitely. We know that two years ago new sections of the cave were discovered when four adventurous guards crawled through a narrow opening that led them into vast unexplored caverns. The guards took advantage of a drop in Roaring River to wriggle through the tiny crevass that had been submerged for centuries. Then, following a twisting, dark passageway they crawled and squirmed hundreds of feet until finally they emerged into a series of strange undiscovered caves, abounding with natural wonders. These mighty new cavern worlds are now being explored and studied by archaeologists and scientists and will not be open to the public for perhaps another year. Whether or not more new underworlds will be discovered, remains to be seen.

* * *

Q. Do the stars ever move?—Laurence Henry, Portland, Oregon.

A. Yes. As a matter of fact there is no such thing as a stationary star. Although stellar motion is not visible to the unaided eye, our astronomical instruments prove conclusively that the heavenly bodies are in constant motion. The sun, for instance, travels at a speed of 170 miles a second for 200,000,000 million years to complete a single trip around its orbit.

* * *

Q. What is this invisible paint I've been reading about?—Theodore Dombrowski, Sioux City, Iowa.

A. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as invisible paint, outside the realm of fantasy fiction. However there is a substance, compounded from graphite that is being used in this capacity. Applied as a paint to planes it gives them a protective coloration against a misty or foggy background that renders them practically invisible at an altitude of a hundred feet or more.

* * *

Q. What is the largest meteorite that has ever struck the earth's surface?—Philip Morrison, Mo-

—weighing 60 to 70 tons have been found in the Rockies and a fragment of the Cape Cod, meteorite weighed close to eighty tons. Undoubtedly the great granddaddy of all is the one that dug the mighty meteor crater at Meteor Crater, Arizona. Although unexplored, it is safe to say that this meteoric monster is as big as all the others combined.

Q. Why is it that ships follow a circle course, rather than a direct compass bearing, in long voyages?—Henry Gropaulis, Omaha, Nebraska.

A. In long voyages, the Great Circle course (the circle you mentioned) is followed because it is, in reality, the shortest distance from port to port. It is an arc whose center is the center of the earth, and thus is even shorter than a so-called direct line compass bearing. For example, the distance between Yokohama and San Francisco is 5,244 miles by Great Circle course, and 5,517 miles by direct compass bearing.

* * *

Q. What do they mean when they speak of Absolute Zero and why is it impossible to attain?—Herbert Rochester, Denver, Colo.

A. Absolute Zero is a term used by scientists to indicate the theoretical temperature of 273 degrees. It is impossible to attain because it is impossible to eliminate all heat producing friction. The friction of molecular activity would have to be stopped before this temperature could be reached.

* * *

Q. Where or from whom did the legend of Atlantis originate?—Matthew Moore, Seattle, Wash.

A. The origin of this legend is derived from a one line reference in the writings of Plato, the great Greek philosopher. Since then the mind of man has dreamed and hoped for centuries that something more definite would be unearthed to give credence to the legend of Atlantis.

* * *

Q. This is not really a science question but I hope you will not disqualify it on that account. I hear so much nowadays about trojan horse activities that I wish you would explain why this is used as a symbol of treachery.—Morris Dubinsky, Madison, Wis.

A. Homer tells of the city of Troy invaded and conquered by soldiers who had lodged themselves in the interior of a huge wooden horse before it was rolled through the gates into the city. Thus the trojan horse has become a symbol of duplicity and subversive activity. It was probably the first fifth column.

* * *

Q. Does altitude decrease automobile horsepower?—Steve Hamas, Newport, R. I.

A. Altitude, as it increases, can effect a decrease in automobile horsepower. This is due to a decrease in the density of the air, as height increases. A car at sea level has 100 h.p.; at 5,000 feet it has only 82 h.p. The same car would have only 60 h.p. at 14,000 ft.

ferred to as the "Warlord," the "Prince of Helium" or "The Virginian." This is one of the old touches that was missing.

Then the civilization on Mars that Burroughs had previously built up in his former books took a beating also. If you remember, he described the Martians as a curious blend of super race possessing an advanced air mastery and possessors of strange scientists, yet barbarous in battle, wielding long swords and riding horse-like beasts. In fact, John Carter gained fame as the greatest swordsman of two worlds. Yet, in "The Giant of Mars" we find, of all things, un-Barsoomian, machine-guns, ye gods, ray-pistols; wait, I'm wrong, ray guns were used in early Carter stories, but never in preference to swords.

But get a load of this—cannons, trench warfare, DIVE BOMBING! BLITZKRIEG! Then, the final blow—parachutes! Not parachutes, Edgar R. I. After the parachutes, nothing disturbed me. Dazed, unbelieving, I waded through to the finish (and what an awful finish—clinch under two moons), without a single shudder. Immediately I went out and read the Sunday Flash Gordon, in an attempt to get the taste of "The Giant of Mars" out of my mind.

After some reflections, I finally came to the conclusions here set forth: (1) Burroughs didn't write "The Giant"; (2) if he did, we must face the sad fact that the old Master has slipped. Quibbling about those little touches? Splitting hairs? I don't think so, for it was these little touches that gave the early stories their charm, these and the atmosphere, the unearthliness of Barsoom. The alien atmosphere and mood are absent, present are very earthly and un-alien machine guns and parachutes. The story, therefore, becomes not the masterpiece we were led to expect, but just another story. Not once can the old John Carter fan believe that here is the old setting, the fondly-remembered characters of the first great Martian stories. Not once has Burroughs captured the fine charm and flavor of those initial tales. The John Carter of "Giant of Mars" thus becomes merely a ZOMBIE, stalking across an unfamiliar scene.

I suppose it was inevitable that Burroughs would lose his touch. With the Giant he has definitely slipped. It's a little sad, though, that he took such a great character with him. I, for one, will remember the old John Carter of "A Princess of Mars," "The Gods of Mars" and the "Warlord of Mars"; the John Carter that is no more.

Hail and farewell, John Carter.

JACK DALEY,
616 Gilroy St.,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

How we could possibly ignore this letter, in all fairness to John Carter, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Barsoom, and the good old readers, your editor can't figure out. So here he is, in defense. First,
(Concluded on page 145)

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CITY STATE



A CITY ON NEPTUNE

By HENRY GADE

An imaginative journey to the city of Saurianum on Neptune. Our back cover illustrates Frank R. Paul's conception of that city, done in vivid watercolor

I'M a space tramp. Sure, and I'm not ashamed of it. A fellow gets to see a lot that way. I don't like being tied down to Earth all the time. No real excitement in it. Now take for instance the time I went to Neptune—

This freighter, the old *Chicago*, was bound for Saurianum, the biggest of the underground cities on Neptune. I knew where she was going when I stowed away, but maybe if I'd known what to expect, I wouldn't have gotten aboard.

Anyway, I did, and after a pretty rough voyage, we landed on Neptune. I climbed out a port-hole and looked around—and if you think climbing out a porthole in a space suit is easy, try it sometime! Well, I didn't see any city. I just saw a lot of bare rock and water. The sky was a mess of clouds, all dirty and heavy-like, and it was cold! Even through the suit I could tell that. I guess Neptune isn't ever much above freezing.

"Hey, you!" I heard a voice in my radiophone. It was one of the ship's officers. He came up to me and looked me over with a sort of grin. "A stow, eh?" he said sort of like he wasn't mad, just having a little joke all by himself.

I found out soon what was so funny. They made me load up with a lot of junk—beads, mirrors, all the stuff I read in history books they used to trade with the Indians—and told me I'd have to work off my passage helping cart the stuff down into the city, which was underground.

Lord how I worked that passage out! Down, down, and still further down, into a tunnel that was as smooth as the magnified surface of a toad's tongue! And I was about dead on my feet when we crawled out into a huge cavern, the biggest hole I ever saw! And there, before me, was Saurianum.

A city? I had to laugh. It was the darnedest collection of copper bubbles oozing out of a fantastic conglomeration of rocks, stalactites, and stalagmites you ever saw.

I guess the city extended for twenty miles in this direction. I never did find out how far exactly, though. It's the same thing everywhere. All the screwy little houses made of copper bubbles, and set up all over the place, hanging, on every jutting rock, on all the little as there was of it, in sight.

Sure it was copper. Pure as you want it. I didn't understand where they

got it myself, at first, but I found out later. The way it happened startled me, too.

All of a sudden, way back in the cave, a loud roar starts. Then a regular volcano begins to erupt, and the whole cave shakes. I began to get scared, but nobody seemed worried. Even when the whole place lit up with a gold light and a column of liquid copper spouted up from a distant cone, just like a geyser on Earth. A lot of acrid smoke filled the place for awhile, but the Saurians didn't seem to mind it. I guess they can almost breathe cyanide and get away with it. Special lungs, maybe.

I wondered why the copper houses didn't roll down from the shaking. I found out they were welded to the rocks, which weren't rocks at all, but solid metal. There isn't much soil down here. What there is is mostly metallic dust, and it is used to grow a funny kind of mushroom vegetation. It's poison to Earthmen, but not to the Neptunians.

These people don't need any streets, or roads, to travel about, even if there was anywhere to go. They have sucker-like discs on their hands and feet, and all over their bellies, and they climb around like flies, walking up-side-down on the roof, and clinging to those round houses of theirs as if they were glued on. They are a sort of simple looking creature, and you wouldn't expect them to have much in the way of brains. And they don't. But they are clever in some ways. Those houses, for instance:

They trot off to one of the volcanoes and set up moulds, made out of metal-dust and water, and let it dry. Then they just shunt the hot copper from the geyser into a trough, pour it into the moulds, and cast their houses in one piece. I had to laugh when I saw a bunch of them moving the houses to where they wanted to put them up. They just rolled them along, twenty or thirty of them rolling each ball. They'd ride on top, as it rolled, like a trained seal on a big rubber ball.

But I got my biggest surprise when we loaded the stuff we'd traded the mirrors and things for. It was yellow and white metal—the same the houses are welded to—gold and platinum! Well, you can have the stuff. I never want to see it again—because I had to haul the lousy stuff up that danged tunnel to the ship!

(Concluded from page 143)

we must admit the "I" that was John Carter was missing. But we have a reason. This story was in the nature of a trial balloon, so to speak, and was not a part of Burroughs' plan for new novels which would later appear in book form. However, if you've read this issue yet, you know your criticism is now unfounded. The real John Carter rides again, across the real deserts and through the real dead cities of the exotic Barsoom we all remember. And he'll ride for four more thrilling adventures that'll tickle you to your toes! We promise. Now, your assumptions: Edgar Rice Burroughs did write the *Giant*. And he didn't slip. He incorporated ideas from modern warfare into a John Carter story, and received many cheers from readers. Now, in another story, he gives once again the old romance and glamour under the exotic moons as of old. Variety—that's what the old master has given you. And the story in this issue will prove to you that he hasn't slipped by a long shot. So, if your illusions have been shattered, pick 'em up and mend 'em again—or easier, read "*The City of Mummies*" and stories yet to come. That'll mend 'em pronto! And by all means write us again. We want to know what you think now.—Ed.

LET'S US KNOW WHAT HE THINKS

Sirs:

After finishing the January issue of AMAZING STORIES, I decided that I ought to let you know what a swell magazine I think it is. For the first time since I have been reading it, I finally found one issue in which all the stories are so superb that I cannot rightly say that I did not like any one of them. For first place I vote "Mystery Moon," closely followed for second by "John Carter, etc., " and "Invisible Wheel of Death." Wilcox sure got something on the ball two years ago, and has kept it rolling ever since then. As far as the other three shorts, they were all good.

I have only one complaint to the general lay-out of the magazine. Why do you have all your features, Meet the Author, Quiz (which ought to be ousted), Discussions, City on Venus, etc., all crowded into the back of the magazine after the stories. Why don't you spread them out, having one between each story? I am glad to see that you have no advertising cluttering up the pages of the actual stories. Keep everything in its place.

Russ J. GRUEBNER,
2306 N. 40th Street,
Milwaukee, Wis.

Well, we put our features at the back of the book because they, like the ads, would break it up if they were scattered about. Besides, keeping them in the back, we have a consistent place for them, where they can easily be found each month, without a great deal of paging about.—Ed.

THE END

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CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Chester Hoey, 301—6th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., would like to bear from Hawaiian girls. . . . Robert Hageman, Jr., Sanborn, Minn., would like pen pals from any place in the United States.

John M. Cunningham, 2050 Gilbert St., Beaumont, Tex., desires pen pals, especially those interested in SF. . . . Max Belz, Waldoboro, Me., will exchange chess moves with advanced players, and has back numbers of AMAZING STORIES to trade. . . . Claude Held, 494 Carlton St., Buffalo, N. Y., will quote prices of SF magazines he has for sale upon request. . . . M. Korshak, 5555 Hyde Park Blvd., Chicago, Ill. will send a free copy of his SF price book on receipt of your name and address.

Williams, Jr., 180 N. Wacker Dr., Chicago, will like to hear from anyone who has the books available. . . . Ricky Swartz, 125 King St., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, wishes to correspond with anyone anywhere. John Compler, W. Va., would like to trade SF books. . . . Bill E. Galloway, 1326 Vermont St., N.W., Washington, D.C., 20 yrs., born in

Mexico and has traveled in Cuba; speaks Spanish and would like pen pals from around Nome, Alaska. Wilma Clark, Route 2, Baxter Springs, Kansas, is desirous of correspondents of either sex, interested in everything. . . . John Wasso, Jr., 119 Jackson Ave., Pen Argyl, Pa. would like to hear from fantasy and SF fans of both sexes in Eastern Pennsylvania with a view toward corresponding and reciprocal visits; interested in music, books, records, the screen, stage and radio.

MEET THE AUTHORS

(Concluded from page 133)

Having had enough of war to last one a lifetime or two, I didn't fancy remaining in Paris. America was only four thousand miles away so off I went. The docks in New York were pretty crowded. As I stepped off the boat, someone grabbed my arm. It was my wife.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"Didn't I tell you?" I asked innocently.

"Yes—but you didn't say that long!"

(End of a very true story.)—James Norman, Chicago, Illinois.

QUIZ ANSWERS

(Quiz on page 135)

TRUE AND FALSE

1. False. Heat is not a substance, it is weightless.
2. True.
3. True.
4. False. It is O₃ and is produced by passing high-voltage electric charges through oxygen.
5. False. Northern belt.
6. False. Just the opposite.
7. True.
8. True.
9. False. It was Archimedes.
10. True.
11. True.
12. True.
13. False. It is found free.
14. True.
15. False. —273° C. is absolute zero.

TAKE YOUR CHOICE

1. C. Its shells rose to a height of 34 miles above the earth's surface.
2. A.
3. D.
4. C.
5. C. James Watt rated the foot-pounds of work done by a horse too high.
1. B.
2. B. It's a common snail.
3. C.
4. A.
5. B. It is a disagreeable odor coming from putrefying matter.

Science Quiz

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific and pseudo-scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine. If you rate 50% correct in your answers, you are considerably ahead of the average. Give yourself 4 points for each correct answer.

TRUE AND FALSE

1. A heated piece of metal would weigh more than when unheated. True False
2. A 160-pound man would weigh only 40 pounds were he to step on a scale 4,000 miles above the earth's surface. True False
3. Atoms are much closer together in a heavy substance than they are in a light substance. True False
4. Ozone is found only in small quantities in the upper layer of air and there is no chemical way of producing it. True False
5. The constellation, Perseus, is in the zodiacal belt. True False
6. A convex lens reduces; a concave lens enlarges. True False
7. An anticyclone is an area of high barometric pressure. True False
8. Calcium, the twentieth element in order of atomic weights, is abundant in solar prominences as far out or farther than hydrogen. True False
9. It was Napoleon who said: "Give me something to stand on and I will move the earth." True False
10. Michelson interferometer is a device for measuring stellar diameters. True False
11. Cepheids, according to the *pulsation theory*, actually expand and contract periodically in size without breaking up. True False
12. We hear a thunderclap long after the lightning flash because the speed of light is much faster than the speed of sound. True False
13. Iron is always found combined with other elements in meteorites. True False
14. Molecular weight is the ratio of the weight of a molecule of a substance to the weight of an atom of hydrogen. True False

15. The temperature —175° F.C. denotes zero or the entire absence of False

TAKE YOUR CHOICE

1. The highest a man-made projectile has risen from the earth's surface is 34 miles. This trip was made by (A) an airplane, (B) Professor Piccard's balloon, (C) a shell from the "Big Bertha" cannon which shelled Paris during the World War I, (D) a sounding balloon.
2. If we wanted to bombard the moon we would have to build a gun with a muzzle velocity of (A) 7 miles per second, (B) 100 miles per second, (C) 1,000 miles per second, (D) it is impossible for a projectile propelled from the earth to escape its gravitational influence
3. Scientists have found that the speed of light (A) decreases when going through glass, (B) increases when passing through ozone, (C) slows down when passing through the ether, (D) remains constant.
4. Thermit, a mixture of powdered aluminum and iron oxide, is noted for (A) its unusual strength, (B) its lightness, (C) its high temperature when ignited, (D) resistance to high temperatures.
5. The power of an ordinary man is about 1/7 H.P. and the average power of a horse is (A) 1 H.P., (B) 5 H.P., (C) 3/4 H.P., (D) 1 1/2 H.P.
6. Were you given your choice between two cameras of the same make with the only difference being that one camera had an f. 4.5 lens and the other an f. 3.5, you would take the f. 3.5 lens camera because (A) you could give a subject a longer exposure, (B) the lens opening would be larger, permitting more latitude in your subject matter, (C) the lens opening is smaller and thus more expensive, (D) the shutter speeds are faster.
7. Were you to watch a *Kelis* move it would (A) run on its hind legs, (B) crawl slowly, (C) flash swiftly across the heavens, (D) hop along.
8. Hemoglobin is (A) a study of the blood, (B) a famous fairytale goblin that lived in a cave, (C) the red pigment of blood, (D) a plant of more than one cell.
9. The principal explosive ingredient in dynamite is (A) nitroglycerine, (B) gunpowder, (C) picric acid in nitric acid, (D) nitrobenzene.
10. If you came across an *effluvium* you would (A) pour water on it, (B) hold your nose and leave the vicinity, (C) pick it up and think yourself lucky that you found it, (D) get a boat and row across it.

(Answers on page 146)

DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers.

Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

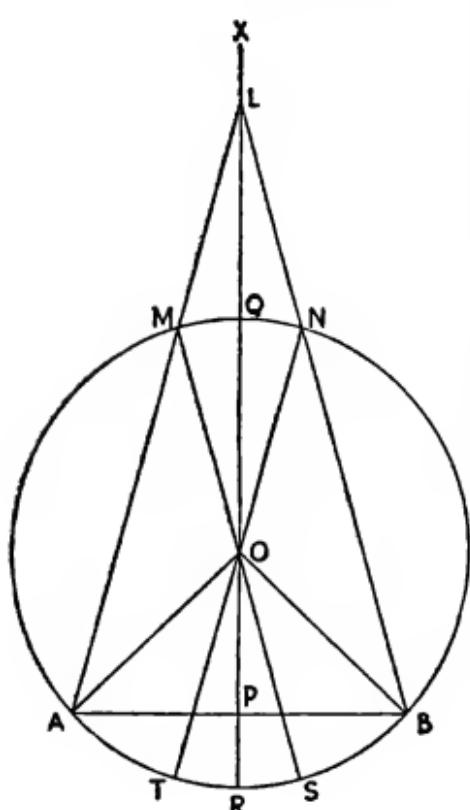
TRISECTING THE ANGLE

Sirs:

In the May number of AMAZING STORIES, p. 132, I. Q. Test, question 3, relates to the trisection of the angle, and on page 146 the statement is made that the angle cannot be trisected.

Will you cast your eagle eye over the accompanying proposition. If you find no flaw, kindly publish it with an invitation to your readers to "jump on it." If there is a flaw kindly advise me.

DR. H. B. WENTZ,
2805 Grand Ave.,
Fort Smith, Ark.



To trisect an angle. Let $\angle AOB$ be an angle. With O as a center, describe a circle cutting angle AOB at A and B . At the middle of arc AB draw the secant ROX . With A as a center, revolve the

straight edge till it cuts ROX making ML equal to AO . (This can be done very easily by putting one point of the compass in contact with the edge of the straight edge and the circumference, and the other point in contact with the straight edge. When the forward point contacts the secant, it does so at L , and the point where the straight edge crosses the circumference at M .)

Draw LMA and LNB . Next draw AB . Draw NOT and MOS . Right angle LPA equals right angle LPB . Arc $QNBR$ equals arc $QMAR$. Point M is common to LMA and to arc $QMAR$. Point N is common to LNB and to arc $QNBR$. Ergo: M is coincident with N ; NL equals ML ; $NLMO$ is a parallelogram; NOT parallels LMA and MOS parallels LNB ; arc MN equals arc AT (being comprehended between parallel chords). Angle MON equals angle TOS (being vertical angles). Therefore arc MN equals arc TS (equal angles at the center measure equal arcs on the circumference—axiom). Ergo: arcs AT , TS , and SB are equal; angles AOT , TOS , and SOB are equal (equal arcs measure equal arcs at the center); the angle is trisected. Q. E. D.

What about it, readers? Your editor has gone over the proposition, and has failed to find said flaw. But then, your editor is no Einstein. Maybe one of you can find what we missed? If so, enter the fray, with pennons flying, and give us the low-down!—Ed.

NOT EXCELLENT—BUT BEST

Sirs:

I've been reading AMAZING STORIES for quite some time, on and off. It's a pretty good mag, I guess. Though it isn't excellent, by any means, it is the best on the market.

What's this about AMAZING putting out a quarterly? Please explain as I am interested.

ED TERBOVEC,
37 Capistrano Ave.,
San Francisco, Calif.

Looks to us like your left-handed praise is about as high as it could get, and still be left-handed. We are glad to know we are best, and we'll try hard to be excellent, and thereby remove your last obstacle to perfect enjoyment. The quarterly appears four times a year, and consists of past issues of AMAZING STORIES Monthly, rebound in a larger

14ers" to correspond with me.

BILL McFARLAND,
1184 Mulvane,
Topeka, Kans.

P.S.—How about some more of those amusing stories? "The Visible Invisible Man" only made me hungrier for more.

You haven't any support, from where we eye the situation, for your statement about the interior illustrations for the Burroughs story. Take a look at the ones in this issue. They are the finest art you've seen in a long time. That, my dear fellow, is illustrating! Time stories—senseless dribblings of simple minds—oh my, we've printed your address! We disclaim all responsibility for what irate authors will do to you. Time travel is the most fascinating subject of science fiction, and is perhaps the oldest subject to be treated by writers in this field. H. G. Wells started it a long time ago. What's so bad about imagining something that's gone? Is it worse than imagining something that never existed, nor ever will? An imaginary planet is in that category. Maybe those amateur artists will illustrate "Discussions" for us? How about it, you artists? We'll publish any good illustrated letters.—Ed.

HARSH, LORETTA? IT'S "BALM!"

Sirs:

Your January issue is so good that it is making me write this letter to Discussions. First, the praise, and then the blame.

It is delightful, of course, to read a brand, new story by the great and illustrious E. R. Burroughs, and I certainly hope you can persuade him to write more of them. "Skidmore's Strange Experiment" was the story I enjoyed most; it is a good idea to have at least one story like that in every issue, i.e.: short, and not too full of red-blooded, two-fisted adventure. This David Wright O'Brien seems to be going places fast.

Joseph J. Millard's article about the inexplicable Pyramid of Gizeh has set my brain to churning around, wondering what race of people could have existed who possessed the ability to build the marvelous thing. What if their descendants are on Mars watching me through their super-telescopes as I write, and reading every word? Maybe they can hear my pen scratch on the paper. Wooley, it gives me the shivers to think of it!

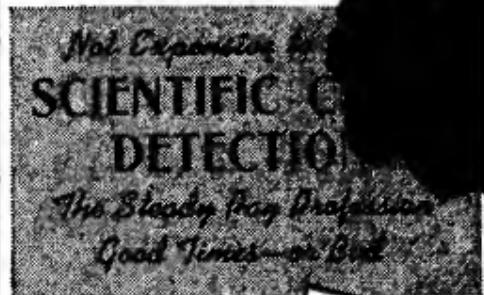
Your features are fine, and I like them as well as, or better than the fiction.

Now, here are a few "peeves."

The quiz is my favorite feature. It is cleverly done every time, and eagerly awaited by me, yet the creator of it gets no credit. Why not publish the author's name?

I think some of your writers should spend a little more time on the literary part of their work. I get kinda tired of guys and gals who always have chiseled, patrician, or granite features, and all that sort of stuff, if you know what I mean.

"The Invisible Wheel of Death" by Don Wilcox



"I will teach you Finger Print Identification — Firearms Identification—Police Photography—and Secret Service!" That's what I told the men who now handle the good jobs listed in the column at the right. Give me a chance and I'll train YOU to fill an important position in the fascinating field of scientific crime detection.



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THE MEN
WHO THEN
GOT THESE
BIG JOBS

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H. B. LAYBON, President Dept. 55-H. Spencer, Indiana

has a good, original idea in it, but all the same I consider the story a thinly-veiled cops 'n' robbers tale which might as well have happened right here on earth in 1940.

I hope this criticism is not too harsh to print; it is supposed to be constructive, as AMAZING STORIES is still my favorite mag., and has been so for many years.

LORETTA A. BEASLEY,
201 N. Wilbur Ave.,
Sayre, Pa.

Yes, by golly, we did persuade Burroughs to write more. He will come at you all through 1941, every other issue, and maybe oftener. He's in this issue, and he'll be back in May, with more John Carter. Millard has written a special article about the pyramids because of the flood of requests for "more" from the readers. It'll appear soon. The Quiz? Well, Julius Schwartz, Henry Gade, John Kerchevsky, Fred Hurter, and Jack West, to mention a few off-hand, do them, and quite well, too.—Ed.

A STIFF BRICKBAT

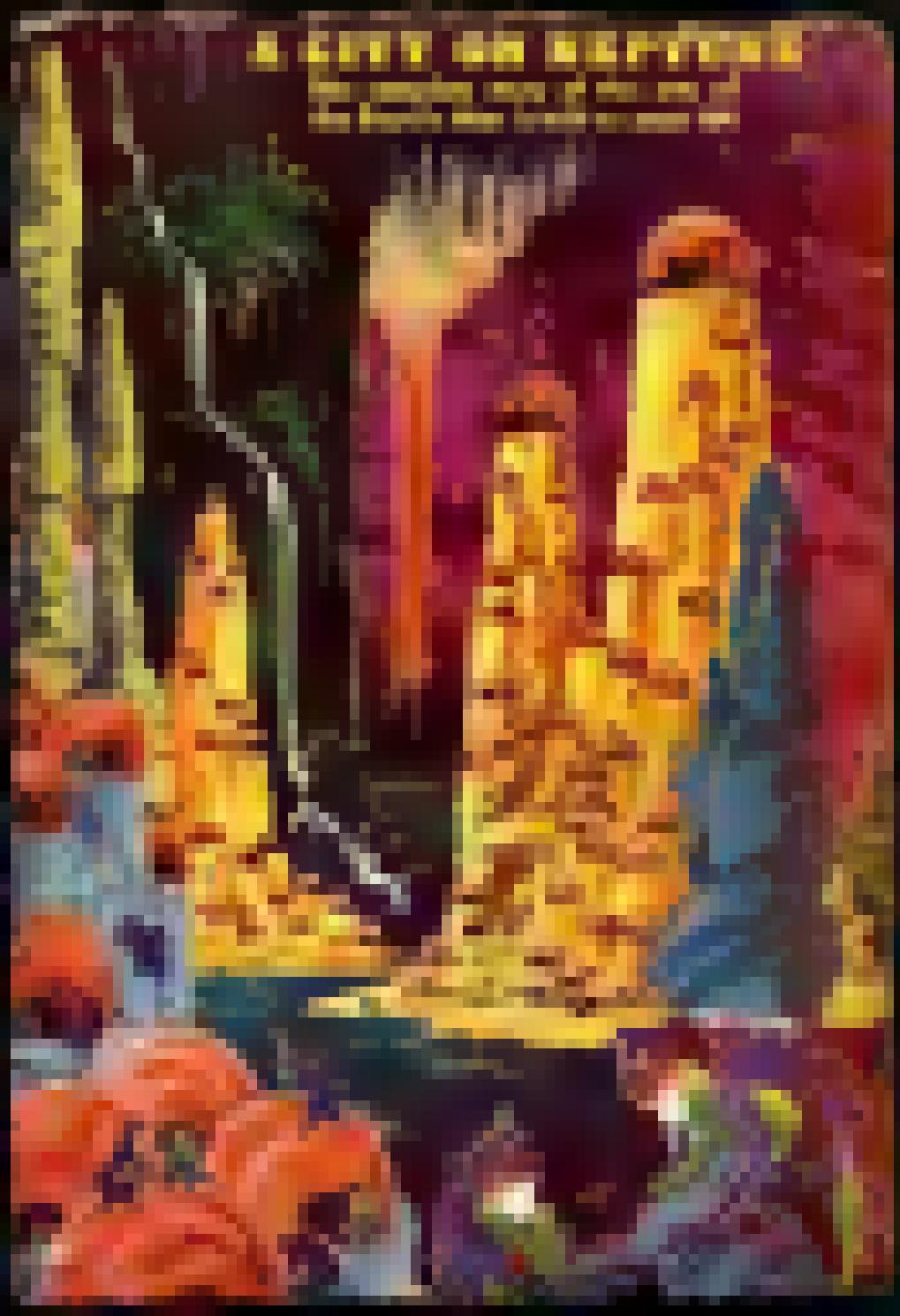
Sirs:

I've been reading AMAZING STORIES steadily since March. This is in the nature of a kick, not actually against you, but rather an author. I do not expect to see this letter printed in Discussions; it's a pretty stiff brickbat. First, I like AMAZING, else I wouldn't read it every month. When you informed the readers that Burroughs would soon be in with a John Carter story, I looked forward to reading it with pleasure, as E. R. Burroughs is my favorite author. The first science fiction story I ever read was "The Princess of Mars" and since then I have read all of Burroughs' books. The John Carter stories, though, were my favorites; Burroughs did his best work on these and I believe many fans will agree with me.

I was glad to see that John Carter was returning and I anticipated reading about a favorite character again. Perhaps I shouldn't have expected so much, then I wouldn't have been so greatly disappointed. "John Carter and the Giant of Mars" is the worst story Burroughs has ever written, and you should never have published it.

From the beginning of the story there was something lacking. "The Giant of Mars" was presented in the third person, while all previous Martian stories in which John Carter is the central figure were told by Carter, in the first person. This departure from form threw me off stride at the start, and I noticed as I continued reading that the old Burroughs' touches were absent. No fine attention to detail that marked his earlier works; the marked change in style was only too evident, and a change for the worse it was.

Other things that grated on me were the constant referring to Carter as the "Earthman"; undoubtedly the tiredest of all trite stock phrases in interplanetary fiction. Never once was he re-





Another scan
by
cape1736

